

*"The unexamined life is not worth living"*  
Socrates

## PROFESSOR KAROL WOLFKE AS AN ACADEMIC MENTOR

It is not so common, even in the academic world to meet a Great Mind and a very Good Man in one person, but Professor Karol Wolfke – my first real mentor during my legal studies several years ago – was exactly this.

Actually the reason why I chose the international law seminar was more concerned with his personality than the sole field even though from the very early days this particular field seemed to be quite interesting for me. Already the way Karol Wolfke used to lecture was far from ordinary and not typical for the teachings of legal subjects I used to attend, and what distinguished Professor from most of my lecturers was a rare class, style and elegance in speech and reasoning that rather did not fit to socialist university manners at that times. The Professor knew how to explain and clarify matters which were difficult to understand for law students of these dark times soon after martial law in Poland had been abolished, students who lived in closed country and experienced little nor no relations with the outside world. Thanks to this, many of us were able to understand the whole essence of such an uncommon legal order of international relations - so distant from socialist law but also so different from any regular set of domestic regulations. Actually, after all these years that have passed, it has not changed much – good academic teachers of international law are still not so numerous. However Karol Wolfke had something more - His general approach seemed to be special one, set against the background of most of the tutors who students had a chance to meet with – full of wisdom on one hand, but with an intelligent and ironic sense of humour on the other. introducing a completely new and unusual world. Some of his sayings regarding the imperfections of human nature and the sophisticated character of international relations heard back then, are still in my mind.

What I did experience, while preparing my master thesis under his supervision, was a brilliant assistance, full of profound remarks hitting the core of any problem with the substance of my writings as well as the methodology, teaching softly but not patronizing even if points made were very relevant touching upon any mistakes. That guiding light has led me since those early times until the very day and I still recall how any paper should not be prepared. Seminar times also allowed me to get to know Professor Karol Wolfke much better as a good person, helpful and open-minded. He had the unusual gift of concentrating always on the bright side of life and wishing

everybody all the best. It became, to me, even more astonishing after I learnt about all the experiences he had to face during WWII along with imprisonment. It was also quite an achievement to sit at an intelligent distance from daily challenges and all the inconveniences of living in a communist state.

Professor Karol Wolfke's academic achievements and his contribution to the developments of the international law jurisprudence are unquestionable and undisputed. For all Polish international lawyers, especially those who had a chance to study or work in Wrocław in previous decades, it is matter of pride to belong to the same community as him. There is no need to comment about them in detail in this paper but some general remarks are definitely worth mentioning, starting from the ability to evaluate the wider context of international law and its special function in international relations and even to predict the way it might evolve. Despite all the developments of the last quarter of century, especially in Europe, his striking considerations on the hegemony of the Great Powers presented 70 years ago turn out to be completely not outdated. Probably the most famous work of Karol Wolfke, on customs in international law, became an, obligatory reading for every international lawyer and is appreciated worldwide. Along with some other profound analyses of codification, the above works proved the Professor's intellectual acuity to apprehend all the doubts and controversies connected to the modern understanding of sources of international law as well as their functioning in the practice of states and international organizations. What is particularly impressive is that the Professor demonstrated his deep interest in areas not limited only to more traditional fields of international law. His pioneering researches on international environmental law, at a time when almost nobody in Poland thought about it, must have been very inspiring in a more general way for anybody looking for his own path in revealing new undiscovered territories.

An openness to diverse academic interests as well as an advanced method of research which Professor Karol Wolfke was known for, in a way became also an inspiration for me as a young graduate student. At the beginning of '90s the law of European Communities could also seem to be an almost completely undiscovered field, especially taking into account the brand new perspective of research i.e. the Polish process of integration at the time of the post-communist transition. Thanks to the above, I could appreciate this area as worthy of stronger academic commitment. Trying, however, to stay faithful to the Professor's interest in sources of international law at the same time, I came to an idea of some good combination of all the above and decided to focus on the international agreements of the EEC, which finally became the subject of my doctoral thesis. Even if my subsequent fields of interest, especially EU internal market law, seemed to be substantially much more distant from those beloved by the Professor, that initial inspiration of discovering the new has actually stayed vivid up to the present.

*Aleksander Cieśliński*