



**The ILA study group on the Role of
Cities in International Law
City Report: Toruń**

By Agata Kleczkowska

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Author:

Agata Kleczkowska¹

Institute of Law Studies
Polish Academy of Sciences

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City Report on International Law: Toruń

1. Introduction

Toruń is an almost 800 years old city, located in the north-central part of Poland upon the Vistula river. It has nearly 200,000 inhabitants, which makes it a medium-sized city compared to other agglomerations in Poland. In the course of its long and rich history, Toruń has witnessed many important historical events. Among them were also those of an international character, such as the signing of the First and Second Peace of Toruń in 1411 and 1466, or the conclusion of the Treaty of Toruń in 1709 during the Great Northern War between Augustus the Strong, King of Poland and Lithuania, and Peter the Great of Russia. For almost 150 years, Toruń was also a member of the Hanseatic League. During the partitioning of Poland, Toruń formed part of Prussia (later the German Empire) and was reincorporated into Poland on 18 January 1920. Today, Toruń remains a vivid cultural and administrative center with many international contacts, not only as the capital of the region with an important historical side, but also as a spot of many worldwide events, participant of international programs and the headquarters of 'Liga Polskich Miast i Miejsc UNESCO' (League of Polish UNESCO Cities and Places).

The aim of this report is to demonstrate that not only the State capitals and the largest metropolises, but also medium-sized cities like Toruń, may engage in a variety of international networks which substantially influence the lives of inhabitants and enhance the cities' development. The report discusses the international cooperation and actions in which Toruń is currently engaged. It highlights that the majority of Toruń's international practices is connected to the efforts towards preservation and promotion of the City's history and monuments. To this end the report reviews the following fields: links between Toruń and international organizations; Toruń's participation in city networks; realization of the sustainable development goals by the City; as well as activities undertaken by the City to preserve human rights.

2. Toruń and international organizations

2.1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The rich history of Toruń is reflected in its mesmerizing architecture. Despite the turbulent experiences, including the Second World War, the City's Old Town survived almost untouched, which makes Toruń one of a few places with the biggest number of original Gothic monuments in Europe. Such a heritage requires special protection. That is why, in 1989 'Pax', a Public Committee, was created, which aim was to induce Toruń's inscription on the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Cultural Heritage List.² The idea of inscription of Toruń on the list was broadly supported by both local authorities, as well as cultural institutions.³ Soon the authorities of Toruń requested the Minister of Culture and Arts of the Republic of Poland to endorse the Toruń candidature and prepared materials indispensable for the application. In October 1996, Toruń was visited by a representative of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Committee, Prof. Dr. Architect Jonas Glemża, who was delegated to the city to verify the conformity of the actual state of affairs with the information contained in the Toruń's submission; his evaluation was favourable.⁴

From 4 to 6 December 1997, the 21st plenary session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee took place in Naples. One of the items submitted to the discussion during the session was the examination of nominations of cultural and natural properties on the World Heritage List; that included also the Medieval Town of Toruń. The nomination was worded in the following way:

The Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe this site on the World Heritage List on the basis of cultural criteria (ii) and (iv). Toruń is a small historic trading city that preserves to a remarkable extent its original street pattern and outstanding early buildings, and which provides an exceptionally complete picture of the medieval way of life.⁵

On the 4th December, the Committee decided to inscribe Toruń on the World Heritage List.⁶

On 5 June 1998, during the special session of the City Council of Toruń a document confirming the inscription of Toruń on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List was officially presented to the authorities of Toruń by Peter Strasser, a representative of the Centre of World Heritage.

² *Toruń on the UNESCO World Heritage list*, available at: <https://www.torun.pl/en/kultura/torun-unesco-world-heritage-list> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

³ M. Arszyński, *Toruń na Liście Światowego Dziedzictwa UNESCO* [Toruń on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List], *Rocznik Toruński* 1999, vol. 26, p. 19.

⁴ "Toruń - 20 lat na Liście Światowego Dziedzictwa UNESCO". *Wystawa w Sejmie* ["Toruń – 20 years on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List". Exhibition in Sejm], 12.09.2017, available at: <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentId=AC93F7C410F29C9DC12581990060D1E9> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

⁵ World Heritage Committee, Twenty-first session, Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda : Examination of nominations of cultural and natural properties on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger, Paris, 14 October 1997, WHC-97/CONF.208/10, p. 13.

Criterion (ii) states that the cultural property should 'exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design', while according to criterion (iv) it should 'be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history' (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention as in force in February 1997, WHC-97/2, par. 24a)

⁶ Inscription: The Medieval Town of Toruń (Poland), CONF 208 VIII.C.

In the first Periodic Reporting Cycle in 2006, UNESCO representatives assessed that 'The city authorities have become aware of their responsibility for its heritage and the inhabitants have come to appreciate the value of the UNESCO inscribed site.'⁷

Toruń is the headquarters of 'Liga Polskich Miast i Miejsc UNESCO' which 'helps support activities connected with preservation, promotion and maintenance the Polish gifts from the Past – for the Future.'⁸

2.2 World Health Organization

In 1991, Toruń joined the World Health Organization (WHO) Program 'Healthy Cities' which 'is a global movement working to put health high on the social, economic and political agenda of city governments.'⁹ Toruń is broadly recognized as the active hub which reacts to health problems of its inhabitants, while the City's budget prioritizes the resources for healthcare. Moreover, Toruń is committed to the WHO priority 'Health for all' which results in multiple preventive programs in City, as well as encouraging greater health and ecological awareness for inhabitants. The City of Toruń is especially focused on the health conditions of young people; better conditions of functioning and greater participation in public life of disabled persons; and support for elderly people. As a result of Toruń's cooperation with the WHO, the pro-health awareness of inhabitants has substantially increased, seniors and disabled people are more present in public life, and the physical condition of Toruń's residents has improved.

Toruń also participated in the WHO program of Coordinated Noncommunicable Disease Intervention (CINDI). Some of the activities undertaken within the framework of CINDI are continued until today, including especially the preventive programs. For instance, Toruń was one of the first cities in Poland to enact a law protecting its residents against harmful tobacco smoke. In 1993, the Council of the City of Toruń adopted a resolution which aimed to protect the health of non-smokers and to encourage smokers to quit the habit. In 1997 the Council adopted another resolution which limited or completely eliminated smoking in public buildings. In 1993, Toruń was one of four Polish cities admitted to take part in the WHO Multi City Action Plan for a Tobacco-free Europe. Toruń also participated in many national and international anti-smoking campaigns, such as 'Quit and Win' or 'World No Tobacco Day'.

⁷ Section II: Summary of the Periodic Report on the State of Conservation, 2006, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/document/163138> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

⁸ Available at: <http://liga-unesco.pl/welcome-2/> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

⁹ WHO European Healthy Cities Network, available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/who-european-healthy-cities-network> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

2.3 European Union

In 2011 Poland took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Toruń was one of the Polish cities which hosted some of the Presidency's events. For that purpose, the Mayor of Toruń, Michał Zaleski, appointed the plenipotentiary for the Polish presidency. Toruń hosted the meetings of the Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors; Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum; Politico-Military Group; and Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management.¹⁰

Toruń also took part in the project Gen-Y City within the URBACT framework. The aim of the project was to support the creative industry and innovative enterprises. In June 2016 the project's kick-off meeting was organized in Toruń. All cities taking part in the project created cross-sectoral networks, the aim of which was to connect young entrepreneurs, public sectors and NGOs; as well as Local Groups URBACT, comprised of representatives of local governments, researchers, business environment and representatives of generation Y, which submitted proposals on how to solve existing problems in the field concerned. Thanks to the project, Toruń learnt how to respond to the needs of young people and support innovative undertakings.

The City also benefits from countless projects funded by the EU funds, which include both building new infrastructure, as well as professional development of inhabitants. The Mayor of Toruń said in 2019 that projects realized in the City 'fit well into the EU philosophy of supporting development of local community, revitalization and ecology.'¹¹ Toruń is the biggest beneficiary of the Regional Operational Programme for Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship for years 2014-2020, as it received in total approximately 1,2 billion PLN from the Programme¹² and is ranked 7th among Polish cities leading in using EU funds.¹³

2.4 The Council of Europe

In 2001, Toruń was honored with the Honorary Flag of the Council of Europe for international activity and for contribution in promoting the idea of European unity. Wilfried Böhm, honorary

¹⁰ M. Behrendt, *Polska prezydencja w Radzie UE po toruńsku* [Polish Presidency in the Council of the EU in Toruń's style], *Gazeta Wyborcza Toruń*, 27.06.2011, available at: https://torun.wyborcza.pl/torun/1,48723,9852084,Polska_prezydencja_w_Radzie_UE_po_torunsku.html?disableRedirects=true (last visited 16.05.2020).

¹¹ M. Litwin, *Toruń korzysta z unijnej szansy* [Toruń takes advantage of the EU opportunity], 30.04.2019, available at: <https://www.torun.pl/pl/torun-korzysta-z-unijnej-szansy> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

¹² *Toruń szykuje się do walki o nowe fundusze europejskie* [Toruń gets ready to fight for new European funds], *Tereny Inwestycyjne Info*, 24.06.2019, available at: <https://www.terenynwestycyjne.info/rozmowa-z/torun-szykuje-sie-do-walki-o-nowe-fundusze-europejskie> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

¹³ M. Manerowska, *„Toruń skorzystał z obecności w Unii Europejskiej”* [„Toruń took advantage from being in the EU], *Radio GRA Toruń*, 10.05.2019, available at: <https://gra.fm/torun-skorzystal-z-obecnosci-w-unii-europejskiej.html> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

member of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, handling the award to the Mayor of Toruń, said that

You bring the dream of Europe united in peace and liberty into the present day and you make this dream come true one step after another at the basis of the human coexistence. The number of your undertakings is so great that I am not able to enumerate all of them. The cooperation in association of cities and partnership with Göttingen, Hämeelina, Leiden, and Čadca is great proof of this (...). The issue is that we should get together everywhere in Europe, and not to separate. Borders will be relatively quickly overcome by economy, but we should also overcome those barriers that have not been built from the barbed wire, but from mutual stereotypes and prejudices.¹⁴

Four years later, in 2005 Toruń received the second highest distinction, the Honorary Plaque of the Council of Europe, for efforts by the residents of Toruń in promoting integrity and common values.

In 2017 Toruń hosted the meeting of the General Assembly of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and its related events. ALDA was founded at the initiative of the Council of Europe to coordinate and support the network of Local Democracy Agencies. ALDA's annual assembly is a key meeting, gathering all members of the Association to discuss the strategy and activities of the organization.¹⁵ The event was attended by over 170 representatives of organizations and institutions from 37 States.

3. Toruń and city networks

3.1 International Association of Peace Messenger Cities

Since 2011 Toruń has also held membership of the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities (IAPMC) which 'was established to recognize and encourage the role and responsibility cities have in creating a culture of peace.'¹⁶ The year 2011 was of special significance for Toruń, as it ran under the slogan of 'Toruń miastem pokoju' ('Toruń – the city of peace') to commemorate the First and Second Peace of Toruń of 1411 and 1466. Moreover, every year in September Toruń celebrates the International Day of Peace, established by UN General Assembly (UN GA) Resolution 36/67.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Honorary Flag of the Council of Europe*, available at: <https://www.torun.pl/en/miasto/samorzad/kontakty-partnerskie-i-miedzynarodowe/europejskie-wyroznienia-dla-torunia/honorary-0> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

¹⁵ *Mark your agenda for ALDA General Assembly 2017 - Toruń, 10-12 May!*, 19.01.2007, available at: https://www.ald-europe.eu/newSite/news_dett.php?id=1836 (last visited: 16.05.2020).

¹⁶ IAPMC, *About Us*, available at: <http://www.iapmc.org/About-Us> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

¹⁷ UN GA Resolution 36/67 'International Year of Peace and International Day of Peace' of 30 November 1981, A/RES/36/67. Under the second paragraph of the Resolution 36/67, the UN GA proclaimed the International Day of Peace on third Tuesday of September.

When it comes to the city's activities within the Association, in May 2014, Toruń hosted the meeting of the IAPMC Executive Committee.¹⁸ The Mayor of Toruń, welcoming the members of the IAPMC delegation, said that 'I hope that here, in the city which resisted the turmoil of many wars in history, you will feel the deepest value of peace, which we all faithfully serve'.¹⁹

In 2019 a delegation from Toruń took part in the 30th General Assembly of the IAPMC held in Sarajevo. The participants of the Assembly adopted the Sarajevo Declaration 2019, in which they, *inter alia*, reaffirmed 'the importance of the culture of peace in ensuring a sustained and achievable individual human right to peace'; acknowledged 'the potentially pivotal role of climate change in exacerbating conflict between and within states, where cities will be most strongly affected, that can lead to a restoration of authoritarian politics and the threat of war'; and encouraged 'governments to fully embrace and implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which are the blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, by achieving goals and targets by the year 2030'.²⁰

3.2 Organization of World Heritage Cities

Since 1998 Toruń is a member of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) which 'connects with more than 300 cities having on their territory a site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List'.²¹ Membership of the Organization is a prestigious distinction, since only cities whose monuments have supra-regional, universal and original values can belong to the OWHC. Toruń is very active in the OWHC - in 2019 the representatives of the City took part, *inter alia*, in 15th OWHC World Congress 'Heritage and Tourism: Local communities and visitors – sharing responsibilities' held in Cracow, as well as participated in a workshop organized in Warsaw by the OWHC Regional Secretariat of the Central and Eastern Europe, concerning the interpretation of cultural heritage.

Toruń supports other cities associated within OWHC in the face of humanitarian crisis. In 2003, the authorities of Toruń, together with the Polish Humanitarian Action, joined forces to help the Iranian city of Bam, affected by a major earthquake. The Mayor of Toruń called upon the authorities of other Polish cities participating in the OWHC to provide assistance for the inhabitants of Bam. At the same time, the Mayor of Toruń also requested the residents of

¹⁸ *Tańczyli dla pokoju* [They danced for peace], available at: <https://www.torun.pl/pl/tanczyli-dla-pokoju> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

¹⁹ *Pokojowe Orędzie na Barbarce* [Peaceful message on Barbarka], available at: <http://5site.um.torun.pl/pl/pokojowe-oredzie-na-barbarce> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

²⁰ IAPMC, Sarajevo Declaration 2019, available at: http://www.iapmc.org/Portals/1/Documents/GA/2019/Sarajevo_declaration_2019.pdf (last visited: 16.05.2020).

²¹ OWHC, *Introduction and Mission*, available at: <https://www.ovpm.org/all-about-owhc/introduction-and-mission/> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

Toruń to join the fundraising and gift collection for the victims of earthquake. Toruń itself transferred 10,000 PLN as the humanitarian help.²²

3.3 New Hansa

As mentioned in the introduction, Toruń belonged to the Hanseatic League, which was a unique association of cities of the Northern Europe. In a world where the notions of 'State's sovereignty' or 'international organizations' did not exist yet, the League managed to last for over 500 years (1159-1669) thanks to the realization of common economic interests that bound the member cities from the Western and Eastern Europe. The economic ties were in fact the only link that tied the cities, as formally the League had no legal status, no army, and no finances; the rules of organization were established by Hanseatic diet and *Hansetag*, which nevertheless were not the regular organs of the League.²³ In short, long before the emergence of the international organizations in the shape known today, Toruń was a member of a network of European cities that despite many differences were able to cooperate due to the goals they shared.

New Hansa is committed to follow the traditions of the Hanseatic League, as it is 'an active network of towns and cities that historically belonged to, or had active trading exchanges with' the Hanseatic League.²⁴ New Hansa was found in 1980 and since then became the largest voluntary association of towns and cities. By the example of the historic Hanseatic League, it wants to promote cooperation between European cities, contribute to the European unity and raise cities' awareness that they also have an important role to play in terms of democracy.²⁵ Toruń is a member of the New Hansa since 1998. The participation in the New Hansa allows the City and its inhabitants to understand cultural, political, and social differences of other nations; teaches tolerance and mutual respect; strengthens the appreciation for democracy; as well as brings together citizens of Eastern and Western Europe.²⁶ Thanks to its active participation in the organization, in 2023 Toruń will host the International Hanseatic Days, which is an annual meeting of representatives of the New Hansa Cities from all over Europe; arrangements for this event have already begun.²⁷

²² *Trzęsienie ziemi w Iranie – toruńska inicjatywa pomocy* [The earthquake in Iran – Toruń's initiative for assistance], available at: <https://www.torun.pl/pl/trzesienie-ziemi-w-iranie-torunska-inicjatywa-pomocy> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

²³ P. Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, Vol. I, With a New Introduction by Mark Casson, Routledge, London and New York 1999, pp. xvii-xviii, 92-97.

²⁴ *Die Hanse today*, available at: <https://www.hanse.org/en/hanse-today/active-network/> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

²⁵ *Ibidem*. See also Articles of Association for DIE HANSE (available at: <https://www.hanse.org/pdf/Articles-of-Association-for-THE-HANSEATIC-LEAGUE-10.06.2014x.pdf>; last visited: 15.10.2020).

²⁶ *Toruń in the New Hansa*, available at: <https://www.torun.pl/en/miasto/samorzad/kontakty-partnerskie-i-miedzynarodowe/torun-new-hansa> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

²⁷ *Hanse day today*, available at: <https://www.hanse.org/en/hanseatic-days/previous-hanseatic-days/> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

4. Sustainable Development Goals

It was mentioned before that Toruń's delegation took part in the 30th General Assembly of the IAPMC which adopted a declaration encouraging governments, *inter alia*, to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, these are not only national governments, but also cities which may participate in the realization of the aims. Toruń is especially committed to implementation of sustainable development goals in areas of ecological education and eco-friendly activities,²⁸ protection of environment²⁹ and spatial planning.³⁰ Its care for sustainable development was acknowledged in 2016, as Toruń came first in the region and 15th in Poland in the ranking of cities realizing goals of sustainable development.³¹ The ranking took into account such data as capital investments per one inhabitant, number of employed persons, number of enterprises, number of graduates of high schools and number of users of sewage treatment plant.

5. Protection of human rights

Not only the State's government has influence on the protection of human rights, but also local authorities may have an enormous impact on the education about, awareness of, and perseverance of human rights. Toruń is actively engaged in promotion of tolerance. In 2016 the City organized for the first time 'Toruński Tydzień Tolerancji' (Toruń's Week for Tolerance). The round of events started on 16 November to mark the International Day for Tolerance, established by the UN GA Resolution 51/95 of 12 December 1995. As the Mayor of Toruń, M. Zalewski said, there is no better date to talk about respect for foreigners and other cultures.³² In 2019, 'Toruński Tydzień Tolerancji' included meetings with foreigners living in Toruń, with supporters and opponents of the LGBTQ+ environment, as well as with disabled people and their caregivers; intercultural workshops; and many more.³³ The aim of 'Toruński Tydzień Tolerancji' is developing proper civil attitudes such as understanding, tolerance, kindness, cooperation and counter discrimination.

²⁸ See e.g. Uchwała Nr 1002/06 Rady Miasta Torunia z dnia 27 kwietnia 2006 r. zmieniająca uchwałę w sprawie budżetu miasta na rok 2006, Rozdział X [Resolution No. 1002/06 of the Council of Toruń of 27 April 2006 changing resolution on the budget of the City on Year 2006, Chapter X].

²⁹ See e.g. Uchwała nr 681/05 Rady Miasta Torunia z dnia 27 stycznia 2005 r., załącznik nr 1 [Resolution No. 681/05 of the Council of Toruń of 27 January 2005, annex no. 1].

³⁰ See e.g. Uchwała Nr 512/2000 Rady Miasta Torunia z dnia 27 lipca 2000 roku [Resolution No. 512/2000 of the Council of Toruń of 27 July 2000].

³¹ T. Bielicki, *Toruń najlepszy w całym województwie!* [Toruń is the best in the entire voivodeship!], *Nowości*, 26.11.2016, available at: <https://nowosci.com.pl/torun-najlepszy-w-calym-wojewodztwie/ar/c3-11507748> (last visited: 15.10.2020).

³² More information (in Polish) available at: <https://www.torun.pl/pl/torunski-tydzien-tolerancji> (last visited: 16.05.2020).

³³ *Toruński Tydzień Tolerancji – program*, available at: <https://www.torun.pl/pl/torunski-tydzien-tolerancji-program> (last visited 16.05.2020).

In 2020 Toruń, together with NGOs, plans to start the activities towards the national and ethnic minorities, as well as towards greater integration of foreigners in Toruń.

6. Conclusions

The example of Toruń proves that cities may actively engage in international cooperation, although at a different level than States. This cooperation can take different forms: on one hand there are city networks which serve as fora for collaboration of cities, dealing with matters important from the perspective of local communities; Toruń is a member of several such organizations. These associations of cities are focused on the preservation of monuments, propagation of history and promotion of cities as attractive tourist spots. On the other hand, intergovernmental organizations seem to appreciate the role of Toruń in the promotion of culture and history, which is reflected in the position that Toruń has in these organizations, although the City does not have any formal role in the international legal system.

This latter situation is a direct consequence of the position of cities on the grounds of international law – in general cities do not have formal status and are deprived of capacities under international law. Moreover, contrary to non-state actors such as NGOs or armed groups, they are on the very beginning of their way to becoming included in the international legal system. However, cities may have a certain impact on their national governments, both individually and through the organizations they form, and support the adoption of good practices and standards important for local communities or even all citizens. In addition, through their policies, cities also contribute to the promotion and realization of values supported by intergovernmental organizations, including especially the field of human rights. In such a way, standards and values may be directly translated into everyday practices that affect individuals.

In the case of Toruń, the City's rich history and the protection of the memory about the past triggers its international cooperation. International practices that follow influence the lives of inhabitants and all City's visitors. Thanks to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List and participation in OWHC, Toruń can better work towards the preservation of its priceless monuments and promote Polish and local history all over the world. More importantly, this international collaboration also influences the awareness of residents of Toruń as to the value of their monuments, and contributes to the development of a sense of belonging to the place they live in. The same goal is also achieved by participation in New Hansa, and contacts with partner cities which remind everyone about Toruń's past and help to cultivate the city's traditions. International recognition like the Council of Europe awards or the organization of EU meetings prove that the work done by Toruń and its inhabitants is visible and appreciated not only in Poland, but also abroad.

Thanks to Toruń's engagement, the policies promoted by intergovernmental organizations, such as the UN or the EU, can have a direct impact on the lives of the city's inhabitants. That

refers especially to the implementation of WHO programs, participation in such projects as Gen-Y City within the URBACT framework, as well as the protection of human rights, including the values of tolerance and integration.

As to Toruń's participation in the IAPMC, it has different character, as the role of the organization is to enable cities to have influence on the practice of State governments. However, the activity of IAPMC is not known worldwide, and does not seem to have any real impact on governments, although it demonstrates that cities want to influence foreign policy and engage with international legal norms.