Views that emerge from these meetings of Pacem in Maribus will not necessarily be reflected in the policies of governments. But expert knowledge applied to consideration of possible alternatives is a prime source of information and ideas, and so necessarily of influence.

Senator Claiborne Pell

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a landmark of international diplomacy and one of the world’s most important international environmental treaties, was opened for signature in December 1982. Elisabeth Mann Borgese, who served in several capacities related to its negotiation, died some 20 years later in February 2002 having devoted much of her career to protecting the ocean. This article focuses on Elisabeth’s work leading up to the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), the negotiations that produced the Convention. From the formal start of UNCLOS III in...
1973, participants entered into nine years of negotiations unprecedented in size and scope and drafted a convention unique in international law. Elisabeth began researching ocean governance in 1967, just months before the General Assembly established an ad-hoc committee to study uses of the seabed beyond national jurisdiction. Building partly on this research, she helped initiate the first _Pacem in Maribus_ (PIM) convocation in 1970; regular PIM meetings on contemporary ocean issues continue today, long after the Convention was signed. Elisabeth also helped found the International Ocean Institute (IOI) in 1972, which acquired observer status to UNCLOS III in 1974. Finally, she served as an adviser to the Austrian Delegation to UNCLOS III, led by Ambassador Karl Wolf. This article introduces all three of those roles but, for reasons of space, focuses primarily on her work preceding the formal start of the UNCLOS III negotiations in 1973.

What follows is one step removed from Elisabeth’s first-hand assessments of how she, PIM and IOI contributed to UNCLOS III. She and others have published descriptive and general accounts on all three points, but this article aims to do more. It draws largely on primary and secondary materials in the papers Elisabeth left to the archives of Dalhousie University, where she taught from 1978 until her death in 2002. Focusing on the years leading up to UNCLOS III, it attempts to establish a method for identifying whether and how Elisabeth’s influence, or that of IOI and PIM, surpassed the “mere” exchange of ideas that this article’s opening quotation from Senator Claiborne Pell suggests. That method will be applied in a subsequent article examining key episodes during the UNCLOS III negotiations for indications of her influence and that of IOI and PIM.


7. Elisabeth Mann Borgese fonds, MS-2-744, Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Citations to materials from this collection are abbreviated hereafter as “EMB fonds, MS-2-744.” G. Brown, K. Harvey and S. Calder, “The Archives of Elisabeth Mann Borgese: A Guide,” is a comprehensive finding aid to the fonds, available online: <http://www.library.dal.ca/DUASC/FindingAids/MS_2_744#a10>.