

UPF Europe and the Middle East: Western Balkans: Facing Historical Challenges

Yvo Bruffaerts
July 30, 2020



Clockwise from top left: H.E. Nataša Mičić, H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, Mrs. Jolanda Trebicka, Mr Mark Brann, H. E. Alfred Moisiu, H.E. Filip Vujanović

A 'Peace Talks' webinar was held on the theme "The Western Balkans Facing up to Historical Challenges and Seizing Looming Opportunities".

The webinar was organized on 30 July 2020, by UPF Europe and the Middle East and the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP). The online webinar had more than 250 viewers from over 40 countries.

The Western Balkans Region is at a crucial time in its integration process into the European Union. The Covid 19 crisis has brought enormous financial and economic problems to the region. Yet, the focus on national self-interest, enduring burdens from past conflicts, and the jostling for influence of the big powers (amongst other factors) are undermining efforts to bring peace and prosperity. Historically, the Balkan Peninsula has been a crossroads between civilizations, religions and cultures. As a bridge between East and West, it remains a great asset for Europe as a whole. In the post-Covid 19 environment, the Western Balkan nations are faced both with historical challenges and opportunities. The ongoing process of social reform and democratization needs to be met with a commitment toward regional reconciliation and cooperation. The Balkan leaders' efforts toward integration need to be matched by visionary leadership from EU policymakers.

The Panelists were:

H. E. Alfred Moisiu, President (2002 – 2007), Albania

H.E. Filip Vujanović, President (2003 - 2018), Montenegro

H.E. Nataša Mičić, President (2002 - 2004), Serbia

H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President (2006-2010), Kosovo

The video can be viewed on Vimeo at vimeo.com/443392740 or on YouTube at youtu.be/fYTfIKWstx0



Mr Mark Brann, Vice President UPF Europe and Middle East and Director of ISCP Europe and Middle East

Mark Brann trained and practised for many years as a lawyer, was Director for Europe, the Middle East and Africa of United Press International and C.E.O. Europe of the North Korea Medical Aid project of the International Relief and Friendship Foundation. He is currently the Vice President of UPF Europe and Middle East based in the United Kingdom and the Director of the International Summit Council for Peace Europe and Middle East.

Mr Mark Brann, Vice President UPF Europe and Middle East and Director of ISCP Europe and Middle East gave the opening remarks.

Today's "crisis" is more than the COVID-19 pandemic. One dimension of it is the ever-increasing tension between a narrow and self-interested nationalism and a vision of the world based on the ideal of humankind being, or becoming, one family or one nation of humankind going beyond boundaries of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion to build a world of "Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universally Shared Values". UPF unashamedly espouses the latter vision. Indeed, at last October's Tirana World Summit UPF Co-Founder Dr Hak Ja Han Moon, strongly called upon the nations and peoples of the Balkan to embrace such a vision and said that in doing so, the Balkans would not only transform its own painful past but be the agent of transformation in Europe as a whole. This vision and profound hope of hers has inspired the holding of this webinar today.



Mrs. Jolanda Trebicka, President, Europartners Development, Albania

Mrs. Jolanda Trebicka is an expert on governance and public sector reforms. She has 20 years of professional experience in the area of economic and institutional development and has been working for 13 years for the Government of Albania. From 2000-2006, she was employed by the World Bank as a Public Sector Management Specialist. Since mid- 2006, Jolanda has worked in all countries of the Western Balkans and various Central Asian countries on different technical assistance programs financed by the E.U., UNDP, DFID, IMF and WB. As an external expert on SIGMA/OECD, Jolanda has been assisting different countries, such as Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, and Egypt, in their process of improving central policy development systems. Currently, Jolanda is the Team Leader of the EU financed technical assistance project "Municipalities for Europe", a project that is assisting the municipalities of Albania to achieve better governance in the European integration processes at the local level.

Mr. Brann then introduced the moderator, Mrs. Jolanda Trebicka, President, Europartners Development, Albania, who served as the moderator for the panel and introduced the panelists.

Panelists:



H. E. Alfred Moisiu, President (2002 – 2007), Albania

After graduating from the Academy of Military Engineering in Moscow in 1958, President Moisiu served in high positions at the Ministry of Defense and received in 1979 his PhD in Military Science. He served twice as Vice Minister of Defense in 1981 and 1991. By establishing the Albanian North Atlantic Association in 1994, he became a major figure guiding the reform of the Albanian Armed Forces and Albania's integration into NATO. In 2002 he was elected President of Albania by trans-party consensus. As President, he was active in solving internal political conflicts and strove to develop regional peace initiatives. He is today a highly respected figure in Albania.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, the president of Albania (2002-2007) spoke first. He said it is quite disturbing that nearly 25 million people of the Western Balkans, who have lived on this peninsula for centuries still have not found a peaceful balance of coexistence and understanding among each other, whilst other European nations have succeeded in doing so.

Linguistic, cultural and religious differences and a painful past, are just some reasons for this. However, it is clear that the local policy-makers serving their own interests is a major obstacle for peace and mutual understanding. Moreover, in some countries religious leaders uphold old nationalist mentalities, which

makes matters worse.

The political and economic development of the West Balkan countries is not at the same level. Also some countries are closer to EU membership than others. Serbia, but also some EU member states, still refuse to recognize Kosovo. Progress to solve problems is so slow that youngsters lose hope and emigrate. Understandably, the EU is right to be reluctant to accept new members.

For this reason H.E. proposes that the EU becomes more tolerant, and hereby refers to the old military saying: "The soldier learns the step by being in line". An accelerated inclusion of the Western Balkans into the EU would be more productive than following the established and highly bureaucratic procedures. It would benefit the economy and also security considerably. The EU must understand that without putting the Western Balkan nations in line, it will be difficult for them to embrace the ways of living and running a European democracy.

[Click here for the full text of H.E. Alfred Moisiu's intervention.](#)



H.E. Filip Vujanović, President (2003 - 2018), Montenegro

Filip Vujanović graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law School. He was Minister of Justice from 1993–1996 and then Interior Minister from 1996 to 1998. He served as the first Prime Minister of Montenegro 5 February 1998 until 8 January 2003. On 5 November 2002, he became speaker of the Montenegrin parliament, a position which, from 25 November 2002, made him Acting President of Montenegro. He was President of Montenegro from 22 May 2003 – 20 May 2018. On 14 December 2006, he signed the Framework Document for the accession to the Partnership for Peace Programme, whereby Montenegro became a member of the NATO program "Partnership for Peace".

H.E. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro (2003 - 2018) spoke next.

The Covid 19 pandemic, as well as the global problems of sustainable development and climate change, have shown that multilateralism, global partnership and cooperation are quintessential. They have shown the value of the UN and the WHO, as well as the need to eliminate the weaknesses of these organizations and to improve their efficiency.

The Western Balkan countries should learn from their painful past and accept those global interests. Cooperation and partnership are quintessential for the development of these countries and the region as a whole. In this regard, the membership of Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania of NATO and the membership of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in NATO's Partnership for Peace program are of special value.

Additionally, the readiness for further European integration and membership of the EU is important for the future, as the Western Balkan countries will not fully prosper without the EU, and the EU is not complete without them.

The Western Balkan countries should also further strengthen the ties of regional cooperation, through regional agreements and initiatives, such as the CEFTA and the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).

Mr Vujanovic mentioned the Podgorica Club, whose members – all former presidents and prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries, Croatia and Slovenia - participated in this webinar. The Club supports both the European integration of the Balkan region and operation within the region by strengthening ties in areas of mutual interest.

Finally, he said he was proud that Montenegro succeeded in solving its border issues with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, without the intervention of other nations.

[Click here for the full text of H.E. Filip Vujanović 's intervention.](#)



H.E. Nataša Mičić, President (2002 - 2004), Serbia

Nataša Mičić graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law School and worked at the Užice Municipal Court during the early 1990s. She left the post in 1998 to pursue career as a lawyer. Even though she was almost 33 at the time, she ended up as one of the founders of the [Otpor!](#) student movement, acting as their spokesperson and legal counsel. She became a member of the Civic Alliance of Serbia ([GSS](#)) in 1996. Nataša Mičić was elected to parliament in December 2000 and became the parliamentary vice-president in January 2001. She was president of the National Assembly and the Chairman of its Constitutional Committee from 6 December 2001 – 27 January 2004. She became acting President of Serbia on 30 December 2002,

a position she held until 27 January 2004.

H.E. Nataša Mičić, President of Serbia (2002 - 2004) spoke next.

After Covid 19 the world will not be the same. The crisis has exposed the inevitability of global connectivity, greater solidarity and humanity to face new challenges that require adequate and quick answers.

Politicians should strengthen the trust of citizens that was greatly damaged worldwide already before the pandemic. In the wake of the crisis also looms the danger of increased authoritarianism, especially in the Balkan region, given its past.

Normalization and reconciliation has been a long and difficult process in the West Balkan region. Though some progress has been made these past few years, the process has been hampered by regional political elites who are unwilling to give up their national policies.

There is no readiness in the entire Balkan region to face the past, which is the first step to reconciliation. The worst is Serbia, which refuses to recognize its role in the wars of the 1990s. Supporting Serbian innocence and relativizing its role in those wars is dangerous because it strengthens expectations that the international community may change its opinion in favor of Serbia. In recent times, the international liberal order on which the architecture of the Balkans is built has been seriously disrupted, which has an impact on this region.

Moreover, the region faces additional problems of its own, i.e. the process of creating new identities and consolidating new states and, at the same time, the process of adopting the value system of the EU in view of membership.

As to NATO membership, the Balkan countries also differ: Albania, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are NATO members already. Albania sees a future in NATO membership, whilst Serbia is committed to military neutrality.

Only as a region can the Balkan be a relevant player in international relations. Therefore, regional cooperation under the umbrella of the EU and NATO is important to prevent other 'partakers' from interfering in the region.

Finally, Mrs Mičić said that implementing the uniform system of European values would solve many of the problems, such as nationalism, among the Balkan countries. Even though, Serbia has been confronted with its responsibility in the war, nationalism among young Serbians, who did not experience that war, is on the rise.

[Click here for the full text of H.E. Nataša Mičić 's intervention.](#)



H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President (2006-2010), Kosovo

President Sejdiu was one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) in 1989. He became the DLK President in 2006, position he held until 2010. He was elected as Member of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo in 1992 and 1998. That year he became Secretary General of the Assembly and President of the Committee for Constitutional Issues. He was elected again in 2001 and became a member of the Assembly's Presidency, then re-elected in 2004. In 2006 he was elected President of Kosovo, position he held until 2010. For 33 years, President Sejdiu has been a professor at the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Pristina and published numerous scientific works.

H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President Republic of Kosovo (2006-2010), spoke next.

All nations have a history of their own. Many wise leaders have shown the ability to overcome extremely difficult situations in the past. In the Balkan region we still suffer to this day of the difficult situations we went through. There have been wars for territories and non-existing 'rights', based on lies, at a time a new history was being made.

Because of terrible wars, there have been many civilian victims. This has led to apartheid and a large-scale exodus of more than half of the population. Thanks to the intervention, solidarity and humanitarian aid of the wider international community, an end was put to violence.

Our path to building a free Kosova was and is still based mainly on human rights and freedom for all citizens. We resolutely reject hatred, contempt or apartheid, the evil we experienced ourselves.

Many challenges remain in the Western Balkan nations:

First, the Covid 19 pandemic affects everyone indiscriminately. In this situation cooperation, mutual understanding and uniformity in tackling the pandemic are essential.

Secondly, the pandemic has affected economies worldwide, especially the weaker ones, such as Kosova. In this situation irrational decisions may endanger the relations between countries.

Thirdly, the negotiations between Kosova and Serbia have been very painstaking. The latter still opposes what Kosova has achieved with the international community, i.e. to be an independent country.

Next, peace and stability are still at stake in the important geostrategic position of the Western Balkans as some would still like to redesign the borders. Russia, an opponent of an independent Kosova, is exerting its influence in the region. Hence, the countries in the region should develop policies to strengthen peace.

In conclusion, today's world is different from yesterday's. Let's make sure tomorrow is better than today and yesterday. The beauty of this world is in its diversity. Mother Theresa said: "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

[Click here for the full text of H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu 's intervention.](#)

QandA and closing statements followed:

In response to a question from Sead Sahman, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Montenegro, on the possibility of some Western Balkans countries joining the EU by 2025, H.E. Moisiu said that the Balkan nations must work hard to meet the conditions imposed by the EU and to keep or gain EU member states' trust in the Balkan region.

On the question from Shkurta Hodolli, Center for Human Rights Pristina University, Kosovo, which role young people from the Western Balkans can play in the process of integration into the EU, H.E. Vujanovic said involving young people in the or for process of both regional and EU integration is most important. This should be done by regional institutions, such as the Regional Center of Cooperation in Tirana, founded in 2017, and with the support of foreign nations. Also the Sarajevo-based Center for Cooperation for Eastern Europe, with EU support, has launched the Youth Laboratories of Western Balkan, a 3-year project to improve education and job possibilities, which should result in fewer youngsters leaving their countries.

On the question from Brenton Kottori, public auditor at Supreme Audit Institution of Albania, what the best solution is for the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, H.E. Mičić said that, above all, political reconciliation is needed. Of course, economic and cultural cooperation are very important too. We need to get to know each other better. Travelling and tourism do help. Serbia has a very heavy burden in relation to Kosovo, which in turn also affects Serbia's relationship with Albania. Too much time has been lost. Regretfully, Serbia is a destructive factor in the peace-making process.

On the question from Ivan Dcurić, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, whether Serbia and Kosovo are ready for an agreement now that the Serbia-Kosovo official dialogue has resumed, H.E. Sejdiu said Kosovo has always wanted good relations with the republic of Serbia, which is in the interest of not only Kosova, but of the entire region and beyond. Unfortunately, Serbia keeps on telling the story of the wolf and the sheep - the moral of which is that unjust people do not need an excuse for their behavior. Peace will only prevail when all remaining issues have been solved.

In his closing remarks, Mr Mark Brann, Vice President of UPF EUME and director of ISCP EUME, said that one of the core precepts of UPF is that to establish a world of lasting peace it is essential that we all go beyond historical boundaries and divisions of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion and seek to identify first and foremost as members of One Family of Humankind - or "One Family under God".



SPEECHES

- Speeches

Written by H. E. Alfred Moisiu, President (2002 – 2007), Albania

Dear friends and participants in this meeting,

I highly appreciate this conference undertaken by UPF, International Summit Council for Peace Balkans and also supported by the Podgorica Club, to exchange views on what they should do better and more to further improve relations and trust between the peoples of the Balkans.

It is quite disturbing and interesting at the same time how the nearly 25 million people of the Western Balkans, who have lived on this peninsula for centuries, are still not finding the right peaceful balance of coexistence and understanding between each other. The centuries-old history is extremely painful, but the lessons learned are few, unlike other European nations, which despite past events, know how to create equilibrium.

There are many reasons for this. It is not just linguistic, cultural differences, traditions or religious differences that keep the situation still aggravated. Such differences are and will be everywhere. If we look deeper, it becomes clear that in the first place are the interests of local policy-makers, who are more interested in their stay in power than in ensuring peace and understanding between their peoples.

In this situation, the religious leaders of some countries also have a negative impact, who not only do not take a step back from the well-known old nationalist mentalities, but invest greatly to feed them and keep them alive.

If we take a general look at the situation in the Western Balkans, it becomes clear that there is an unequal development of these countries in terms of both political and economic development. And this is true also from the point of view of EU accession. The negotiations for EU accession have been opened to Serbia and Montenegro, which makes us happy. While Albania and Northern Macedonia, despite the fulfillment of some even capricious demands of their neighbors, are still at a preliminary stage and unknown and with many obstacles to move forward. Bosnia has applied for membership, while Serbia is blocking any progress in Kosovo. Not only Serbia, but also some EU member states, still refuse to recognize Kosovo, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to recognize its independence as a state. While Bosnia has a totally unclear situation, with a bipolar state, with so many differences, that could hardly agree to always coexist together. This has turned Bosnia into a virtually ungovernable country. Albania and Kosovo on the other hand are in a permanent state of crisis. This comes from the fact that many failed political leaders still continue to circulate and fight for taking and retaining power at all costs.

It should be said openly that the EU is right to be reluctant to accept new members, and the pace of progress on our part is too slow, which negatively affects the mentality of our peoples, especially the youth. This as a result increases the tendency in them to emigrate, as it is being generated the feeling of an infinite solution. People want to enjoy life, which is not very long, and consequently patience is lost.

For this reason, I would propose that the EU become more tolerant, given the old military saying that: "The soldier learns the step by being in line". Thus, the accelerated inclusion of the Western Balkans into EU would be more productive, rather than following the established procedures which are highly bureaucratic. In all respects, a quick solution would be more cost-effective, both economically and in the interest of security.

In conclusion, I can say that it is necessary for us Balkan people to work harder in order to increase the trust and the understanding between our peoples, while the EU must understand that without putting us in line, it will be difficult for us to acclimatize to the ways of living and running a democratic European state. Therefore, do not hesitate to accept us amongst you, as we are. In this way we will get used to the rules of European democracy faster and better.

Thank you for your patience and understanding!



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H. E. Alfred Moisiu, President (2002 – 2007), Albania

After graduating from the Academy of Military Engineering in Moscow in 1958, President Moisiu served in high positions at the Ministry of Defense and received in 1979 his PhD in Military Science. He served twice as Vice Minister of Defense in 1981 and 1991. By establishing the Albanian North Atlantic Association in 1994, he became a major figure guiding the reform of the Albanian Armed Forces and Albania's integration into NATO. In 2002 he was elected President of Albania by trans-party consensus. As President, he was active in solving internal political conflicts and strove to develop regional peace initiatives. He is today a highly respected figure in Albania.





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Intervention of H.E. Filip Vujanović, President (2003 - 2018), Montenegro, in the Peace Talk Webinar on 30-7-2020.

Written by H.E. Filip Vujanović, President (2003 - 2018), Montenegro



Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I express my gratitude to the UPF for organizing this conference and its commitment to the Western Balkans in overcoming its challenges and in finding the best future.

We live in a time when such conferences, dedicated to any topic, should highlight the current Covid-19 pandemic. Expressing sorrow for the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, for millions of patients and those at risk of the pandemic, we need to express our faith that humanity will overcome it. We also hope that our society has enough potential not only to overcome the huge economic losses caused by the pandemic but also to utilize all the experience gained through those difficult times in protecting itself from all other global challenges.

The Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the global problems of sustainable development and climate change issues, have confirmed that the role of multilateralism is irreplaceable. No matter how powerful and big are some countries, how important are some regions of the world, global partnership and cooperation have no alternative. That is why multilateral organizations have special value, and our obligations are to strengthen them and develop them. The current pandemic has also shown us the importance of the World Health Organization, whose values should be affirmed, and at the same time whose weaknesses need to be eliminated. All global problems and challenges have confirmed the value of the UN, expressing at the same time the necessity to ensure greater efficiency of this most important global organization.

The Western Balkan countries should accept those global interests, using their historical experiences as a lesson for the future. Unfortunately, the historical experiences of the Western Balkans are both numerous and painful. Only during the last century, the Western Balkan region went through two Balkan wars, two World wars, and the devastating war during the disintegration of Ex-Yugoslavia.

The history of the Western Balkans confirms that peace has no alternative. At the same time, it confirms



that dialogue is the best way to resolve open issues. In the end, it confirms that cooperation and partnership are both precondition and guarantee for the development of the Western Balkans countries and the region as a whole.

Certainly, the special value of the Western Balkans in this regard is the membership of Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania in NATO, Kosovo's determination to be a part of the Alliance, and the membership of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in its Partnership for Peace program.

Additionally, the willingness of the Western Balkan countries to become members of the European Union is also of great value for the future. Montenegro has opened all negotiating chapters in this process, Serbia has opened sixteen chapters, North Macedonia and Albania have started accession negotiations and Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown a clear readiness for further European integration. It must be pointed out that the Western Balkans won't have full prosperity without the EU membership, nor is the EU complete without the Western Balkans!

In addition to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the Western Balkan countries should also be dedicated to further strengthening the ties of regional cooperation in the field of economy, education, culture, science, research, and innovation. They have committed themselves to this by the agreement with the EU and throughout numerous regional agreements and initiatives, among which the most important are the CEFTA and the South-East European Cooperation Process. But, first of all, and above all, they are obliged to do so having in mind their individual and common interest.

Finally, in order to emphasize the importance of cooperation between the Western Balkans, the Podgorica Club, whose members are participants in this conference, was established. Members of the Club are former presidents and prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries, Croatia and Slovenia. Throughout our work, we are strongly advocating European integration of the region, supporting the regional cooperation at the same time, throughout strengthening ties in areas of mutual interest. We will resolutely continue to promote these values and the need for cooperation and good neighborly relations. I am convinced that the future of the Western Balkans lies in deeper connectivity and affirmation of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Thank you for your attention!



H.E. Filip Vujanović, President (2003 - 2018), Montenegro

Filip Vujanović graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law School. He was Minister of Justice from 1993–1996 and then Interior Minister from 1996 to 1998. He served as the first Prime Minister of Montenegro 5 February 1998 until 8 January 2003. On 5 November 2002, he became speaker of the Montenegrin parliament, a position which, from 25 November 2002, made him Acting President of Montenegro. He was President of Montenegro from 22 May 2003 – 20 May 2018. On 14 December 2006, he signed the Framework Document for the accession to the Partnership for Peace Programme, wherewith Montenegro became a member of the NATO program

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Intervention of H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President (2006-2010), Kosovo, in the Peace Talk Webinar on 30-7-2020.

Written by H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President (2006-2010), Kosovo

Your excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to express my thanks to the organizer, UPF, for the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences regarding current situation and prospects of Western Balkan. This kind of conferences represent the future, not only because of popularity of digital means of communication but because of unfortunate circumstances we all find ourselves in due to current Pandemic.

It is certain that after Covid 19 the world will not be the same. The pandemic has exposed the inevitability of global connectivity, as well as the need for greater solidarity, humanity and mutual trust. The paradigm has changed and the whole of humanity is facing new challenges that require adequate and quick answers. In crisis situations, as is the case with Covid 19, politicians have the task of establishing and strengthening the trust of citizens, which was already greatly damaged even before the pandemic all over the world. Another possibility is to increase authoritarianism due to the crisis, which is a danger, especially in systems that are not immune to this phenomenon. In the Balkans especially.

Otherwise, the key issue of the Western Balkans is normalization and reconciliation, which is a long and difficult process. So far, numerous initiatives have been launched and some progress has been made, but unfortunately, we are still at the beginning. It could be said that this process has been in regression in recent years. First of all, because regional political elites are not ready to give up their national policies.

Some problems are almost insurmountable, such as dealing with the past, which is the first condition for reconciliation. In general, there is no readiness in the entire region to face the past. And the most serious and complicated situation is in Serbia, which refuses to see its role and responsibility in the wars of the 1990s. At the internal level, the issue of the devastating consequences of the war policy have not been open yet, although it is at the root of all current problems in Serbia.

The thesis that support Serbian innocence and the relativization of its role for the wars at the end of the



20th century is dangerous because it fuels aspirations based on expectations that international circumstances will change in Serbia's favor at some point. The second thesis suggests that Serbia is constantly threatened by an external enemy.

International circumstances also affect this situation in the region. The international liberal order on which the architecture of the Balkans is built has been seriously disrupted even within the old democracies. Some basic principles have been called into question, which are widely used by regional political elites. The region is additionally facing difficulties that are unique: the consolidation of new states, the transition and transformation of the value system.

So, two processes take place at the same time. The process of creating new identities and the process of formal commitment to membership in the European Union. Although they have the same goal, our countries differ in orientation and the efforts they make. In terms of Euro-Atlantic integration, Montenegro plays a leading role. The fact that Albania, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are members of NATO is also significant. Kosovo also sees a future in NATO. However, although a member of the Partnership for Peace, Serbia is committed to military neutrality, which further complicates the integration of the entire Balkans. Over the last 30 years, great efforts have been made to pacify and consolidate the Balkans.

However, numerous actors are constantly confronted here, and that is why it is important to be under one umbrella. Specifically, the EU and NATO, because that alone opens up a perspective for development. The division into spheres of interest would keep the region constantly under tensions and instability. It is also a chance for the region to opt for a value system that guarantees the rule of law, security, human rights and tolerance, followed by economic empowerment. Resolving the Kosovo issue and consolidating Bosnia and Herzegovina is very important for the pacification and relaxation of the Balkans. Only as a region can the Balkan states be relevant in international relations. That is why regional cooperation is imperative! But she must be honest and equal.

The Western Balkans still need the strong support of the European Union. Otherwise, a favorable space is created for other partakers to interpose and manipulate. True, the EU has reduced its influence in this area due to internal problems, but that is why Germany continues to persevere in these efforts.

On the international scene, all Balkan countries care more about the individual image and attach more importance to the balance of power in the world, than they show a willingness to cooperate with each other. That is why every kind of cooperation is precious. This webinar is also a good way, but I would also like to mention the importance of organizations such as the Podgorica Club, which brings together former presidents and prime ministers of the region, or, for example, the Regional Women's Lobby, which brings together current and former politicians and civil society representatives.

I believe that in the future, such initiatives will become more and more important, that there will be more of them, and I especially hope for more successful regional cooperation.



H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President (2006-2010), Kosovo

President Sejdiu was one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) in 1989. He became the DLK President in 2006, position he held until 2010. He was elected as Member of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo in 1992 and 1998. That year he became Secretary General of the Assembly and President of the Committee for Constitutional Issues. He was elected again in 2001 and became a member of the Assembly's Presidency, then re-elected in 2004. In 2006 he was elected President of Kosovo, position he held until 2010. For 33 years, President Sejdiu has been a professor at the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Pristina and published

numerous scientific works.

