

UPF London, United Kingdom: Western Balkans Leaders Look to Peaceful Future

Yvo Bruffaerts
July 30, 2020

London, United Kingdom -- The former presidents of Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo were the distinguished speakers at a UPF webinar.

"The Western Balkans: Facing up to Historical Challenges and Seizing Looming Opportunities" was the title of the "Peace Talk" held on July 30, 2020. More than 250 viewers from over 40 countries took part.

The online event was organized by the Europe/Middle East chapters of UPF and of the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP), a UPF project.

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. Efforts to bring peace and prosperity are being undermined by national self-interest, burdens from past conflicts, and the big powers' jostling for influence (among other factors).

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 facing both historical challenges and opportunities. The ongoing process of social reform and democratization needs to be met with a commitment toward regional reconciliation and cooperation. Balkan leaders' efforts toward integration need to be matched by visionary leadership from European Union policy-makers.

Panelists:

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, president of Albania (2002-2007)

Alfred Moisiu served as Albania's vice minister of defense (1981 and 1991). He became a major figure guiding the reform of the Albanian armed forces and Albania's integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From 2002 to 2007 he served as president of Albania, helping to solve internal political conflicts and striving to develop regional peace initiatives. He remains a highly respected father figure in Albania.

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

Filip Vujanović served as minister of justice (1993-1996) and interior minister (1996-1998). He served as the first prime minister of Montenegro (1998-2003). After briefly serving as speaker of the Parliament, he was president of Montenegro (2002-2018). In 2006, he was instrumental in Montenegro joining NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

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

Nataša Mičić co-founded and was active in the Otpor! ("Resistance!") student movement in Serbia. She became a member of the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS) political party in 1996 and was elected to the National Assembly in 2000, becoming its vice president in 2001. She was president of the National Assembly and chair of its Constitutional Committee from 2001 to 2004 and was president of Serbia from 2002 to 2004.

H.E. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu, president, Republic of Kosovo (2006-2010)

Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu has been a professor of law at Pristina University since 1987. He was a co-founder of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) in 1989 and elected as a member of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo in 1992, 1998, and 2001. He served as president of Kosovo from 2006 to 2010.

Moderator:

Jolanda Trebicka, president of Europartners Development, Albania, and team leader of Municipalities for Europe, an EU-financed technical assistance project in Albania. She is an expert on public sector management and reforms.

Mark Brann, vice president of UPF for Europe and the Middle East and director of ISCP for Europe and the Middle East, gave the opening remarks.

Today's "crisis" is more than the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. 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, Mr. Brann said. Indeed, at the Tirana (Albania) World Summit in October 2019, UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon strongly called upon the nations and peoples of the Balkan Peninsula to embrace such a vision. In doing so, Dr. Moon said, the Balkans would not only transform their own painful past but also be the agent of transformation in Europe as a whole. This vision and profound hope of Dr. Moon inspired the holding of this webinar today, Mr. Brann said.

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

[H.E. Alfred Moisiu](#), the president of Albania from 2002 to 2007, spoke first. He said it is quite disturbing that the 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, while 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 local policy-makers serving their own interests are a major obstacle to 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 Western Balkan countries is not at the same level. Also some countries are closer to European Union membership than others. Serbia still refuses to recognize Kosovo -- as do some EU member states. Progress in solving problems is so slow that young people lose hope and emigrate. Understandably, the EU is right to be reluctant to accept new members.

For this reason President Moisiu proposed that the EU become more tolerant; he referred 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 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.

[H.E. Filip Vujanović](#), the president of Montenegro from 2003 to 2018, spoke next.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the global problems of sustainable development and climate change, have shown that multilateralism, global partnership and cooperation are essential, he said. These problems have shown the value of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, as well as the need to eliminate the weaknesses of these organizations and improve their efficiency.

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

Additionally, readiness for further European integration and membership in 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 further strengthen regional cooperation through agreements and initiatives, such as the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).

President Vujanović mentioned the Podgorica Club, whose members -- all former presidents and prime ministers of 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 had succeeded in solving its border issues with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina without the intervention of other nations.

[H.E. Nataša Mičić](#), the president of Serbia from 2002 to 2004, spoke next.

After COVID-19 the world will not be the same, she said. The crisis has exposed the inevitability of

global connectivity, greater solidarity, and finding adequate and quick answers to new challenges.

Politicians should strengthen the trust of citizens that was greatly damaged worldwide even before the pandemic. In the wake of the crisis there is also the danger of increased authoritarianism, especially in the Western Balkan states, given their past.

Normalization and reconciliation have been a long and difficult process in the Western Balkans region. Though some progress has been made in recent 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 Serbia's role in those wars are dangerous because they strengthen 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 North Macedonia are NATO members already. Albania sees a future in NATO membership, while Serbia is committed to military neutrality.

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

[H.E. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu](#), the president of the Republic of Kosovo from 2006 to 2010, was the final speaker.

All nations have a history of their own, he said. Many wise leaders have shown the ability to overcome extremely difficult situations in the past. In the Balkans region we still suffer to this day because of the difficult situations we went through. There have been wars for territories and non-existent "rights," based on lies, at a time when 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 Kosovo was and is still based mainly on human rights and freedom for all citizens. We resolutely reject hatred, contempt and apartheid, evils that 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 are essential in tackling the pandemic.

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

Thirdly, the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia have been very painstaking. The latter still opposes what Kosovo 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 Kosovo, 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 its diversity. Mother Teresa said: "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

A question-and-answer session and closing statements followed:

In response to a question from Sead Sahman of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Montenegro, on the possibility of some Western Balkan countries joining the European Union by 2025, President Moisiu of Albania 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 of the Center for Human Rights of Pristina University, Kosovo, as to the role young people from the Western Balkans can play in the process of integration into the EU, President Vujanović of Montenegro said involving young people in the 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 the Western Balkans, a three-year project to improve education and job possibilities, which should result in fewer young people leaving their countries.

On the question from Brenton Kottori, public auditor at the Supreme Audit Institution of Albania, as to the best solution for the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, President Mićić of Serbia said that, above all, political reconciliation is needed. Of course, economic and cultural cooperation is very important too. We need to get to know each other better, she said. Traveling 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 peacemaking process, she said.

On the question from Ivan Durić of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, as to whether Serbia and Kosovo are ready for an agreement, now that the Serbia-Kosovo official dialogue has resumed, President Sejdiu of Kosovo said that his nation has always wanted good relations with Serbia, which is in the interest of not only Kosovo but of the entire region and beyond. Unfortunately, Serbia keeps 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 prevail only when all remaining issues have been solved.

In his closing remarks, Mark Brann, the vice president of UPF for Europe and the Middle East and director of ISCP for Europe and the Middle East, 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."



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A. MOISIU: ADDRESS TO ISCP WEBINAR

Written by H.E. Alfred Moisiu, former president of Albania
Thursday, July 30, 2020

Dear friends and participants in this meeting: I highly appreciate this conference undertaken by UPF, the International Summit Council for Peace, and also supported by the Podgorica Club, to exchange views on how to 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 staying 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. Not only do they not step back from well-known old nationalist mentalities, but also they 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 inequality in these countries in terms of both political and economic development. This is true also from the point of view of EU accession.

Negotiations for EU accession have been opened to Serbia and Montenegro, which makes us happy. Albania and North Macedonia, despite fulfilling 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 to recognize its independence as a state. Bosnia has a totally unclear situation, with a bipolar state, with so many differences that they 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 their tendency to emigrate, as the feeling of an infinite solution is being generated. 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 the EU would be more productive 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 peoples 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 among 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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Speeches

F. VUJANOVIĆ: ADDRESS TO ISCP WEBINAR

Written by H.E. Filip Vujanović, president of Montenegro (2003-2018)
 Thursday, July 30, 2020

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 their 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 these difficult times in protecting itself from all other global challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic and 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 some countries are, how important some regions of the world are, 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 United Nations, 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 the former 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 the precondition and guarantee for the development of the Western Balkan 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 & 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 & Herzegovina have shown a clear readiness for further European integration. It must be pointed out that the Western Balkans won't have full prosperity without EU membership, nor is the EU complete without the Western Balkans!

In addition to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the Western Balkan counties also should be dedicated to further strengthening the ties of regional cooperation in the fields 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 Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). But, first of all, and above all, they are obliged to do so, having in mind their individual and common interests.

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 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!

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N. MIČIĆ: ADDRESS TO ISCP WEBINAR

Written by H.E. Nataša Mičić, president of Serbia (2002-2004)
 Thursday, July 30, 2020

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 the current situation and prospects of the Western Balkans. This kind of conference represents the future, not only because of the popularity of digital means of communication but also because of the unfortunate circumstances in which we all find ourselves due to the 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 all 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 worldwide pandemic. 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 has not been open yet, although it is at the root of all current problems in Serbia.

The thesis that supports Serbian innocence and the relativization of its role in 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, which are widely used by regional political elites, have been called into question.

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 are taking 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 is playing a leading role. The fact that Albania, Montenegro and North 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 tension 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 & 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 it 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 the 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.

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F. SEJDIU: ADDRESS TO ISCP WEBINAR

Written by H.E. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu, president of the Republic of Kosovo (2006-2010)
 Thursday, July 30, 2020

Dear Mr. Brann, dear Ms. Trebicka, Your Excellencies: Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this debate.

The historical developments of the nations of the world are different. Each has its own story, a story of crisis and of greatness. During this journey, many nations and their wise leaders have demonstrated often enough the ability to overcome their encounters with extremely difficult situations which often have threatened them with disintegration. And all this has come at a difficult time, in facing the evil, hatred, anti-human projects aiming at the "extinction of the other." In one way or another, all the countries of the Western Balkans have been involved in the difficult situations we went through, consequences of which we still are suffering to this day.

The war for territories and the war for a "right" which did not exist, when a new history was trying to be made, built on lies, made the developments go in that manner of opposition, disobedience and refusal.

My people, as one of the oldest peoples in Southeast Europe, have experienced such crises. It has experienced terrible wars. The war of the concluding years of the last century has been one of these. With many civilian victims, with a large-scale exodus of more than half of its population, and apartheid.

The end of this cycle of violence, thanks to the intervention, the solidarity and humanitarian aid of the wider international community which brought an end to violence and to the evils we were experiencing, has brought a new stage in our development.

Despite the objective and great hardships, our path to building a free Kosovo was and is based mainly on the vision of building a state of all its citizens, a state where human rights and freedoms are guaranteed and are being implemented beyond the criteria applicable on the old continent.

We have been and are determined that our path will not be hatred, contempt or apartheid—the evils that we ourselves experienced. All this has arrived with a policy of wisdom based on the foundations of humanism and with the motive of patience and without hatred.

Dear friends, today's challenges in the Western Balkans—but also in each country, after what we have been through—are still great. They are of different natures. I want to emphasize some of them:

First, together we are witnessing a profound humanitarian crisis that the world is experiencing, therefore our region also. The COVID-19 pandemic does not recognize large or small nations. It knows no borders and no state sovereignty.

COVID-19 is equally dangerous to large and small nations. It strikes relentlessly. The death toll is high and increases to the extent that we are not serious about dealing with it. It loses its power as our common consciousness rises in the fight against the virus. Physical distance between people, as is needed, as recommended by the World Health Organization and national health institutes of all countries, means at the same time human closeness and mutual understanding.

Uniformity in treatment, in this world of close to 8 billion, with all its racial, cultural and religious diversity, is essential. People are people, wherever they are. The pain is the same for those who live a better life and for those whose daily needs must be covered with less than two dollars.

Until now many lives have been lost. Many newborn children were affected, pregnant women, people of all ages. Many important personalities of this world have passed away.

Second, from what we have experienced so far in these months of facing the COVID-19, on the global and regional levels we see that local economies are being hit very hard. With this a greater risk is posed to human society. This has naturally affected the countries with low economic development. My country, Kosovo, has been experiencing a huge hit to its economy in recent months. From what is told until now, 56 percent of businesses are not functioning. Even though there is a level of "adapting" to the new circumstances, it is noticeable that all the fields of activities of general interest have been hit hard.

As I have noticed, neither at the regional nor at the global level has a key to getting past this crisis been found. This in reality has added to many dialogues that have put a spotlight on situations of endangering the relations between neighboring countries. So there is a lack of synchronization of actions, making way for irrational actions which we see these days.

Third, Kosovo is in the middle of a very sensitive process of negotiations with Serbia. This is a process, as I call it, necessary for the relaxation of relations between two sovereign countries, while treating the subjects that relate to this function. The experience so far has shown that Serbia is holding on to its idea of ruining of what

Kosovo has achieved with the international community, to be an independent country with its full integrity. The developments so far have been disturbing. Serbia is trying to retell the story of "The wolf and the lamb that blurred the water." That time has passed.

Fourth, because of the important geostrategic position of the Western Balkans, for some years now certain appetites for redesigning the borders have been reborn. The way to that is a way to new bloodshed for the people of this region.

With every tendency for redrawing the borders, it might be known where it starts, but not where it stops.

Ideas like that must be excluded, not made possible, and refused because that they carry and pose permanent danger to the region.

Russia, with its stance of not supporting Kosovo and with its "interest" in other countries of the region, wants to increase its influence. Military bases in Serbia as a help to "the little brother" are a bad omen.

In this light, our countries are in need of developing policies to strengthen the peace, and not policies that may put peace and stability in danger.

Dear friends, it is very true and I must say this once again: Today's world is different from yesterday's. Consider the dangers posed to many countries around the globe. Let's work to make the world of tomorrow better than today's and yesterday's. The beauty of this world is in the colorful diversity it has. It's a small world and a big-enough house for everyone.

I believe in human power, international help and solidarity, and the miracles that can be achieved.

Mother Teresa once said: "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

Thank you.

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