

UPF-Eastern Europe webinar: Balkan and Korean Peninsulas - Similarities

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Tirana, Albania -- Heads of state, political leaders and scholars discussed potential cooperation between the Balkan and Korean peninsulas.

The webinar "Balkan and Korean Peninsulas – Similarities, Learning from Experiences and Possible Cooperation" was organized by UPF of Europe and the Middle East and its constituent association International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP).

The Albanian journalist Lutfi Dervishi was the moderator of the online conference, which was held on March 27, 2021.



Speakers:

- Dr. Yeon Ah Moon, chair of UPF Korea;
- H.E. Alfred Moisiu, president of Albania (2002-2007);
- Hon. Ho-Jin Lee, acting president of the UN Association of the Republic of Korea;
- H.E. Filip Vujanović, president of Montenegro (2003-2018);
- Hyung-Suk Kim PhD, vice minister of unification of the Republic of Korea (2016-2017);
- H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, president of Kosovo (2006-2010);
- Dr. Heung-Soon Park, an expert on UN affairs;
- Hyun-Young Lee, president of UPF Korea;
- Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East.

Dr. Yeon Ah Moon said that the Balkan and Korean peninsulas have much in common, due to their long and complex geopolitical histories. Despite 40 years of occupation by Japan and the destruction of the

Korean War, South Korea has become one of the world's strongest economies in the shortest period of time.

Professor Moon said that the nation's rapid growth is based largely on the strong desire of Koreans for democracy and on solid government leadership, supported by the international community. However, she concluded, "It is undeniable that behind the miraculous growth of Korea lies God's continuous protection."



She quoted UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon: "The difficult global problems cannot be solved with human power alone. They can only be solved when humankind puts God, their Parent, at the center."

H.E. Alfred Moisiu pointed out: "The Korean and Balkan peninsulas, although geographically and culturally far apart from each other, have gone through many similar challenges throughout their history."

The former Albanian president spoke about the long history of conflict in the Balkans and the current state of division of the Korean Peninsula. He expressed his hope that Korea would be reunited and that the Balkan states would be reliable partners for trade and tourism for a reunited Korea.



He also thanked UPF and the Podgorica Club for their support of and participation in the webinar.

Hon. Ho-Jin Lee expressed his appreciation for UPF giving the panelists the opportunity to talk about the noble mission of peace. Peace is the most important of the three pillars that the United Nations was created to uphold, he said.

The Balkan and Korean peninsulas have shared a common fate as battlegrounds for neighboring big powers, Hon. Lee said. One big difference between the two peninsulas is that Korea was sharply divided after World War II, whereas the Balkan states have largely obtained sovereignty and begun to make political and economic progress. "The common task ahead for both peninsulas is how to construct and sustain an enduring peace," Hon. Lee said.

H.E. Filip Vujanović acknowledged the work of the Universal Peace Federation in the Western Balkans. The former president of Montenegro then pointed out three similarities between both peninsulas:



"The first similarity is the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of both the Balkans and Korea on a global level. ... The second similarity is a challenging and tragic 20th century marked by war, destructions, divides, tragic human victims, and suffering. ... And third, maybe the most important similarity between two globally essential regions is their necessity for long-lasting peace."

Dr. Hyung-Suk Kim explained the situation of the Korean division and the challenges that this division poses for peace and economic development. He pointed out, however, that whereas North Korea was militarily and economically stronger when the country was first divided, South Korea has far surpassed the economy of North Korea over the past 70 years.



Dr. Kim said that "the factors maintaining the division of the Korean Peninsula include ideological differences, mutual distrust, power competition among leaders, and the dynamics of the international community."

He stated that Korea can gain valuable lessons from the experience of German reunification and

suggested a concept of peaceful coexistence while acknowledging the differences.

Due to illness, H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu was unable to attend the webinar. His speech was read by Gani Rroshi, the secretary general of UPF for Albania and the Balkan Peninsula.

The former president of Kosovo praised the efforts of UPF for "constantly researching topics of interest, like this one." He said that although the Balkan Peninsula is blessed with an abundance of underground resources, surrounded by oceans and in the midst of continental cultures, it also has been cursed with conflict throughout its history. He said that "the 20th century can be taken as a century of painful experiences that came as a result of transregional wars." He also pointed out such similarities as they relate to the history of the Korean Peninsula in the 20th century. He spoke proudly of his role in fighting for the independence of Kosovo and becoming its first president.



He concluded by saying that economic development is an important condition in melting the ice between North and South Korea, as well as contributing to peace and stability in the Balkan region.

Dr. Heung-Soon Park emphasized that his presentation would "focus upon the introduction of the 'Korean problem' and the approaches for peace and stability issues in the Korean Peninsula in an attempt to draw lessons and implications for a mutual understanding, in particular, for the Balkan audience."

He spoke about the Korean Peninsula as a flashpoint in the world and contrasted North Korea's misery with South Korea's miracle. He concluded by stressing the importance of genuine dialogue and reconciliation with North Korea.

After a question-and-answer session, Hyun-Young Lee of UPF-Korea expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to hold this joint webinar allowing for better understanding between the Balkans and Korea. He said he hoped that God will guide both peninsulas to create a heavenly, unified Korea and a heavenly, unified Balkan Peninsula.

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka offered the closing remarks, thanking the heads of state and other distinguished speakers for contributing to the success of the webinar.

"Traveling around the world, I came to realize that the Balkans and Korea share many things in common," Dr. Otsuka said. "People in both nations have suffered greatly in the past history. That is why the Balkans and Korea are the best places to send out messages of peace to the world.

"It will be wonderful if both the Balkan and Korean peninsulas can work together for realizing peace and development."