

Perspectives for Sustainable Peace in Europe -- Parliamentarians and Society

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United Nations Building in Vienna, Austria



Perspectives for Sustainable Peace in Europe -- The UN Vision, the Role of Parliamentarians and Civil Society

On September 15, 2017, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace, UPF organized a conference at the Vienna international Center (United Nations Building) on the theme: "Perspectives for sustainable Peace in Europe -- The UN Vision, the Role of Parliamentarians and Civil Society." The meeting was also the occasion to launch the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) in Austria.

Co-sponsoring organizations included the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna, The Best of the World Network, the Women's Federation for World Peace, and the International Institute for Middle- East and Balkans studies. In a hall with a full capacity of two hundred people, representatives from the whole political spectrum of the Austrian Parliament, members of the

diplomatic corps, and NGO representatives attended the meeting. Three parliamentarians had come from Italy, the Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

At the opening, as president of UPF Austria, I explained the two purposes of the meeting. First, we were there to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace, with its theme on "Together for Peace." The theme for this comes from the message of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and from the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16, which is "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."



Peter Haider and secretary-general of UPF Austria is just to the left of the podium; to his right is Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, president of UPF-Europe

Our second purpose was the launching of IAPP, a UPF initiative providing a forum for parliamentarians from all nations and political parties to search for solutions to local, national and global problems in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation. A regional launch of IAPP took place on every continent in 2016, including a conference at the British Parliament in September 2016 for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East. After the Global Assembly of Parliamentarians held in Seoul, Korea, in February 2017, we are

launching national chapters throughout the world.

Europe's refugee dilemma

Mrs. Heather Wokusch, from ACUNS Vienna (Academic Council on the United Nations System) moderated the first session, on the theme, "Migration, Refugee Crisis, European Identity -- Perspectives for the Twenty- First Century." Mr. Ismail Balla, director of the Vienna UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, began with a report on the United Nations' efforts to control the arms trade. Austrian parliamentarian Nikolaus Berlakovich, a former minister of agriculture, then spoke about the issue of peace in the Western Balkans. Padre Alejandro Solalinde, a Catholic priest and human rights activist from Mexico, shared about the need to embrace refugees with humanity and respect for our human diversity. Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, president of UPF Europe and Eurasia, provided insight into the UPF founders' philosophy of peace and described some practical projects they have launched for peace and reconciliation, such as the Korea–Japan undersea tunnel. The final speaker was Mrs. Nina Novakova, a member of the Czech Parliament, who described the challenge Europe is going through regarding values and identity.



Sharing insights

The second session, on the theme, "The Role of Parliamentarians for Sustainable Peace in Europe," began with a video presentation of Secretary General Guterres' Day of Peace message. The panel featured four members of the Austrian Parliament representing different political parties -- Mrs. Karin Doppelbauer, from the Liberal Party; Mrs. Petra Bayr, from the Social Democratic Party; Mrs. Barbara Neuroth, from the Green Party; and Dr. Andreas Karlsbock, from the Freedom Party. Each of them express their view and their party's perspective on the need for intra-national and international communication, beyond party lines. They described their contribution to sustainable peace through projects in various areas, such as climate change, ocean protection, aid and trade, or co-development. Mr. Roberto Rampi, from the Italian Parliament, spoke about the problem of refugees and the need to adapt to the changing nature of our identity in a multicultural society.

Launching IAPP

In conclusion, Mr. Jacques Marion, vice-president of UPF Europe and moderator of the session, read the main points of the resolution to launch IAPP in Austria, and called for all parliamentarians to appear in a commemorative photograph and to sign the resolution that had we had placed on a large easel on the stage.

A territorial dispute

Dr. Dieter Schmidt, vice-president of UPF Germany, moderated the final session on the theme, "Europe-Eurasia and the Balkans: Building Trust and Securing Cooperation." Mrs. Christine Muttonen, member of the Austrian Parliament and president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), spoke about her Assembly's efforts to deal with conflicts in Europe, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, which as Wikipedia explains is "a landlocked region in the South Caucasus, lying between Lower Karabakh and Zangezur and covering the southeastern range of the Lesser Caucasus

Mountains. The region is mostly mountainous and forested. Nagorno-Karabakh is a disputed territory, internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but most of the region is governed by the Republic of Artsakh (formerly named Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), a de facto independent state with an Armenian ethnic majority established on the basis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Azerbaijan has not exercised political authority over the region since the advent of the Karabakh movement in 1988. Since the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1994, representatives of the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been holding peace talks mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group on the region's disputed status." In her description of the conflict, Mrs. Muttonen pointed to art and culture as important tools for conflict resolution.

A time of general crises

Alena Kupchyna, ambassador of the Republic of Belarus to Austria, spoke about her country's European identity and about its commitment to play a mediating role in conflicts in the region, through a "New Helsinki Process." Ambassador Peter Schatzer, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean, gave his views on various crises in Europe, from refugees to cooperation in the Balkans. Mr. Viktor Ielenskyi, a parliamentarian from Ukraine, gave a detailed account of the aggression his country has suffered from Russia and about Ukrainians' efforts at resistance. The final speaker, Mrs. Marijana Grandits, from the University of Vienna's Human Rights Research Center, described her experience in promoting human rights in the Balkans and insisted that sustainable peace could only appear on the foundation of restorative justice.

The atmosphere and motivation

The prestigious décor of the UN, the expertise of the speakers, the challenging but relevant theme of sustainable peace contributed to the success of the conference and to an auspicious launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace on the UN International Day of Peace. The Universal Peace Federation has launched the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace as a global association of parliamentarians that provides a forum to bring their experience and wisdom to bear on the search for solutions to our world's problems. Parliamentarians from around the world have offered their remarks on the importance of this work and the value of increased cooperation and collaboration in the search for innovative solutions to some of the critical issues that we face on the local, national, regional and global levels, from climate change to the rise of extremist ideologies to humanitarian disasters and conflict.