

Europeans, Eurasians Hold Fifth Dialogue in Vienna

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By Jacques Marion
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Vienna, Austria—More than 150 people attended the fifth Eurasia-Europe Dialogue, which took place on October 30 and 31, 2015, at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna.

Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps, NGO leaders, UPF Ambassadors for Peace and youth volunteers, and students of the Diplomatic Academy attended the conference, which was held on the theme “Eurasia and Europe Dialogue: Building Trust and Securing Cooperation for Sustainable Development.”

The event was the fifth in a series of conferences aimed at developing partnership and cooperation between the two regions. Previous Eurasia-Europe Dialogues have taken place in 2012 in Moscow and Vienna, in 2013 in Paris, and in 2014 in Chisinau, Moldova. In February 2015 a panel discussion on “The Imperative of an EU-Russia Strategic Reset” was held in Vienna.

Universal Peace Federation, its affiliated organization the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP), the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and the Vienna office of the Academic Council on the United Nations System



(ACUNS) were the co-sponsoring organizations.

Occurring just weeks after the United Nations’ proclamation of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, the event was also an opportunity to explore grounds for cooperation between Europe and Eurasia in the context of the new UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The conference focused on the need to reset a strategy of cooperation between Europe and Eurasia—in particular, Russia—to ensure peace and stability in the region and the world, and to engage the cultural and religious dimensions of dialogue for better mutual understanding and to complement political approaches to conflict resolution. It brought together a broad range of speakers from the realms of politics, academia, religion and civil society, and concluded with a Youth Panel comprising students from Europe and Eurasia.



Ambassador **Dr. Hans Winkler**, the director of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, welcomed participants and reminded the audience that the prestigious academy, founded in 1754, was the second institution in the world set up to train future **diplomats, after the Vatican’s Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy.**

Session I:

Europe and Russia: Resetting a Strategy of Cooperation for Sustainable Development



The first session was moderated by UPF-Austria President **Peter Haider.**



Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF International, who had just attended in Rome the 50th anniversary of the **Vatican II Nostra aetate** (“**In Our Time**”) declaration on the relations of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions, spoke about the need today for any institution or organization to develop trust, cooperation and **solidarity beyond one’s own entity and identity**. This is the essence of UPF’s mission, he said, describing the partnerships UPF has built with prominent organizations around the world. Trust is built and prosperity and development are fostered through the combination of a soft-power approach and dialogue, Dr. Walsh said, declaring his full commitment to developing a dialogue with Russia.

Dr. Sergey Ezhov, head of division at the First Department of CIS Countries at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave a presentation on the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which has functioned since January 1, 2015, with five current member nations: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Dr. Ezhov reviewed its history, outlined its principles and goals, and explained the opportunities it offered for cooperation with the European Union (EU). Russia now has to deal with the EU in the framework of the EEU, he said, but **Brussels’ lack of response to calls for cooperation incites Russia and other EEU nations to establish more cooperative agreements with Asia**.

Dr. Walter Schwimmer, secretary general of the Council of Europe from 1999 to 2004, reminded the audience that Winston Churchill had raised the idea of the Council of Europe in 1943 during World War II, already envisioning a united Europe beyond the conflict. But where is the vision today that initiated both the Council of Europe and the EU, Dr. Schwimmer asked. He insisted on an unconditional cease-fire to stop the killing in Syria, and on unconditional dialogue between Europe and Russia, as such cooperation was in the best interests of each region. Examples of cooperation between China, Eurasia and Europe deserved more attention from the EU, in his view. He also deplored the fact that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) suspended the only tool of dialogue with Russia, the NATO-Russia Council, at the time of the Ukraine crisis. The EU and Russia still need to develop a strategy and road map for their common future, he concluded.



Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky, project manager at the Russian International Affairs Council, stated that problems in



Europe-Russia relations, seen in the context of the Ukraine crisis, were in great part caused by misunderstanding and mistrust among the different parties. The EU overestimated agreements made with Eurasian nations under the Eastern Partnership, which contributed to the current crisis. Europe and Eurasia have a clear interest in cooperating and meeting the challenges and opportunities raised by **Asia's export economies**, he said, citing the ambitious Chinese project of the New Silk Road linking China with Eurasia and Europe, raising the possibility that Crimea eventually could become a major international economic hub. He pointed to Europe and Russia's common security challenges, such as conflicts in the Middle East or the refugee crisis, and reminded the audience about the negative impact of sanctions for both the EU and Russia.



Dr. Jaap de Zwaan, a lecturer on European integration at the Hague University of Applied Sciences and former director of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, reviewed the missed opportunities of recent years in EU-Russia relations and called for a **“bottom-up” approach to reverse the frozen process of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement** between the two blocs. Let us start, he said, with a soft-power, people-to-people approach—education, research, student exchanges, sports, etc.—then move to justice cooperation on issues such as trafficking or migrations, then turn to

the foreign policy domain, including Ukraine, and, last but not least, the economic domain that is full of potential. Indeed, the major stumbling block is Ukraine, where various political solutions could be considered, he said—but first the human situations should be solved, then the political ones.

Session II:

Europe and Eurasia: Toward a Partnership for Peace and Stability

The second session was moderated by UPF-Europe Secretary General **Jacques Marion**.

Dr. Werner Fasslabend, the Austrian minister of defense from 1990 to 2000, described the demographic challenges raised by population



developments in Eurasia, China, India and Africa, saying they eventually will far surpass the current migration challenges. He thus underlined the role of Eurasia-Europe cooperation in securing peace and stability in the region and the world. Showing a series of vivid maps, he pointed to the progress of conflicts along certain lines of development in the world in the last five years, and concluded with comments on the positive aspects of **Russia's intervention in Syria** to mobilize greater support against the Islamic State (ISIS) and other terrorist forces.



Dr. Elena Ananieva, the director of the Center of British Studies of the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences, praised UPF for initiating a dialogue at a time when the ideal itself of dialogue was being dismissed as weakness. She said a subjective approach to foreign affairs based on personal diplomacy could not replace an objective appreciation of national interests and objective tendencies to help predict and deal with conflicts. The West was not sufficiently informed of the objective situation of Russia and the Russian people after the split of the Soviet Union, she said, and the West has been **ignoring Russia's interests and concerns** for its security. Today, she concluded, as Europe is faced with many challenges and the balance of power is shifting toward Asia, Eurasia has become a strategic center that Europe cannot help but deal with.

Dr. Helge Lurås, the director of the Center for International and Strategic Analysis in Oslo, Norway, said that although Russia and Norway mostly



have had good relations in recent decades, Russia was still considered a dominant issue of security in Norway and a large majority of Norwegian people distrusted President Vladimir **Putin's intentions**. In great part, he explained, that was a remnant of a Cold War mindset. However, he said, migration issues will change the European value system that partly justified this antagonism toward Russia and Europe will evolve toward a compromise with Russia. A rapprochement between Russia and Europe will face challenges, however, as some forces in the West or the United States likely will interfere with the process of Eurasian integration.



Dr. Vladimer Narsia, a professor of religion at Georgia American University in Tbilisi, Georgia, began by challenging Russian views on the triggering of the 2008 Georgian-Russian border conflict. He then spoke about the crucial role of interreligious education in a multicultural society, based on the Georgian example. He criticized both the religious education in post-independence Georgia, which focused on one dominant religion as a source of national identity, and also the policy adopted in 2005 that prohibits the teaching of religion in public schools under the pretext of democratic principles. Pointing to the difference between religious indoctrination and interreligious education, he explained the importance of the latter in terms of national security and social stability: fostering dialogue and tolerance, challenging the roots of religious extremism, and promoting the moral development of youth.



Session III:

Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue – Bridging Divisions between East and West

Dr. Walther Lichem, former director of the Department of International Organizations of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, was the moderator of the third session. Referring to the psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, he commented on the current need to “societalize” and relativize absolute truth in the context of diverse communities.



Mr. Marat Hayretidinov, the director of the Department of Science and Education at the Muslim Spiritual Authority of the Russian Federation, challenged the claim by some European politicians that multiculturalism completely failed, pointing to positive multicultural achievements in some European societies. However, he recognized, these have not been enough to prevent the current rise of interreligious and interethnic violence. A main issue, in his view, was the quality of religious education. He criticized attempts by politicians to “modernize” some Islamic traditions, which brought a reverse effect and led to a rise in extremism, as in Tunisia. He saw two fundamental challenges in current Muslim education: the trend by some Muslim educators to focus on theology while neglecting secular sciences—in total contradiction with the practice of great Muslim scholars like Avicenna—and the need to focus on Islamic teachings fostering dialogue and peaceful coexistence with other religions, as testified by numerous passages in the Quran and Hadiths.

Dr. Andrea Giannotti, the co-founder and executive director of the Institute for Eurasian Studies in Pisa, Italy, spoke on the historical roots of Europe’s “Russophobia,” echoing President Putin’s view that “Western partners are benevolent toward Russia only when it is weak.” He reviewed some of the benefits Europe could find in Eurasian integration, and outlined common security challenges faced by both regions: drug trafficking, piracy, the rise of radical Islam or terrorism. In the community of mega-powers like the United States, Brazil, India or China, he concluded, stronger cooperation with Eurasia would strengthen Europe’s position in the long term.



Mr. Christian Rathner, a journalist at the Department of Religion at Austrian National Television, artfully told stories of historical cultural interplay between Russia and Europe, from Russian masterpieces being played in Viennese theaters to Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony being dedicated to a Russian patron of the arts, but also stories of underlying distrust and prejudice. Prejudice comes together with fear, he said, deploring the fact that fear serves to maintain political order and still, to some extent, current world affairs. He spoke of the importance of interreligious dialogue in opening up horizons, reminding the audience that we are all bound together and that “attacking others is attacking oneself.”



Before the afternoon session, a beautiful and moving musical performance by three artists from Kiev, Donetsk and St. Petersburg—three regions in bitter conflict in Eurasia—enchanted the audience with traditional songs from Ukraine and Russia accompanied on violin and piano.



Mr. Sandor Habsburg-Lothringen told the audience that, as a descendant of Empress Maria Theresa, Catherine the Great and Queen Victoria, he has a royal ancestry that embraces both Europe and Russia. He recalled the unique blending of nationalities, cultures and religions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the founding moment for modern Europe that was the 1815 Congress of Vienna. He then introduced his wife, Margarete Habsburg, who spoke about the Flame of Peace, an award given to individuals or organizations dedicated to the work of peace and reconciliation. The couple then offered on stage the wooden and stone award, meaning courage and endurance, to two participants: Dr. Elena Ananieva from Russia and Dr. Walther Lichem from Austria, representing Eurasia and Europe.

government's policy to support traditional families. Family laws, she said, serve the state better than formal laws. On the grass-roots level, as well, women play a key role in cultural education in Russia, a country with over 180 nationalities, she said. They lead various programs and festivals supporting family values and national cultures. Many also play an important role as teachers in schools, where parental care is an essential aspect of school education and nourishing the soul is as important as providing knowledge.

notably in the conflict zone of Transnistria where two national cultures, even different alphabets (Romanian and Cyrillic), have to be dealt with. She introduced the **association's active pedagogical work in collaboration with other countries in the region.**

Three panellists representing youth leaders concluded the panel discussion.

Mrs. Yuliya Vlasova, a master's student at the Lomonosov Moscow State University of Fine Chemical Technologies, an active member of the Green University movement and founder of the Pure Land environmental movement, described the vicious circle of mistrust, fear and weapons which brings humanity toward self-destruction. Disarmament, she concluded, is the only path to be taken.

Session IV:

Engaging Women and Youth to Fulfill Sustainable Development Goals: Education and Leadership

The last session of the first day was moderated by **Mrs. Yoshiko Pammer** of WFP Austria.

Mrs. Marina Pilshikova, the vice president of the Congress of Ethnic Associations of Russia, spoke of the **need in today's society for the specific feminine ability to understand and show compassion toward others.** She explained about the Russian



Mrs. Mariana Marin, the president of the General Association of Teachers of Moldova, reflected on the "social autism" created by the rise of individualism and the lack of communication in society. Priority should be given to education, she said. **She described her country's strategy for educational development until 2020, setting the educational priorities of access, relevance and quality, and the new curricula that are being developed in line with European standards. She spoke about her association's activities,**



Mr. Matteo Bergamini, the 23-year-old founder and director of Shout Out UK, an independent news and media company in the United Kingdom, said that young people do not relate to Sustainable Development Goals because they do not associate with the UN or with political life. In 2005, less than 40 percent of young people voted **in elections. Young people don't understand politics**, he said, because they have not gone through the political struggles that their parents have. It is not a lack of will, but a lack of education and empowerment. Shout Out UK promotes political literacy through school courses and fosters empowerment by organizing youth debates. Earlier this year he launched **the first Youth Leaders' Sebate in Britain in collaboration with two local TV channels**, which was the most viewed program by youth so far in 2015. Thus his company is providing tools for fulfilling the UN agenda of sustainable development, he said.





Ms. Gulnara Iusupova, a master's student in international relations at St. Petersburg State University, stated that youth played a leading role in developing or reviving trust among nations when economic or political ties were low. She related about student exchange programs and university environments in which many social or political issues were discussed in international settings, opening young people's minds to other views; about youth political forums such as the Youth UN model, in which each participant must represent a country different from his or her own—a model that elder politicians could learn from as well, she commented; about volunteering at international events such as the Olympic Games, where partnership and humanitarian principles can be learned.

Session V:

Implications of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals for Europe and Eurasia

On Saturday, October 31, the first morning session was held in the Music Room of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and was chaired by WFWP-Europe President **Carolyn Handschin**.

Dr. Slawomir Redo, senior program advisor at ACUNS Vienna, spoke on local self-governance as a factor of peace and sustainable development. His reflection was based on research about social attitudes toward democracy in Poland, his native country. Social democratic capital,



research shows, is higher in the part of Poland that historically was under Austrian imperial administration in the 19th century than in the regions that were under Prussian and Russian rule: Local self-governance was a specific system of administration established by the Austrian Empire. Analyzing current levels of trust in the police in 26 European countries, he concluded that realigning responsibilities between central and local governments was essential to satisfy the requirement of shared responsibility and shared prosperity in the UN agenda for sustainable development.



Dr. Yuriy Boshytskyi, rector of the Kyiv University of Law of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, introduced facts and data about his war-torn country because knowledge, he said, was the base for accurate perception and right decisions. A major European nation by its size, population, mineral and agricultural resources, Ukraine is also the birthplace of seven Nobel Prize winners. But does one speak of sustainable development in a country afflicted by war, with thousands of victims and a war budget hindering national efforts toward



education, humanitarian relief or road infrastructure, he asked? Early in 2015 the Ukrainian president issued a decree on sustainable development emphasizing development, security, responsibility and dignity. As a university rector, Dr. Boshytskyi pleaded for building a platform of education on which young people would be at the center of sustainable development, recommending academic exchange, friendship networks, cultural programs and publications on SDGs.

Dr. Philipp Depisch, president of the Middle European Initiative, spoke about his organization's objective to be a platform for dialogue between Ukrainians from both sides of the conflict, Russians and Europeans. Having had conferences on the Ukrainian issue in 2012 and 2014, he shared his experience of the misjudgements such a position of mediator can attract, yet reasserted that Austria, with its background as a neutral nation, had a unique role to play in the conflict between Europe and Russia, and Russia and Ukraine.

Closing Session

The closing session called for final reflections from conference representatives and the organizers.



Ms. Elena Kolesnichenko, chair of the UPF Youth Peace Council in Russia, gave her reflections on a future world of peace, justice, equality and dignity, and on the role young people expect to play in building it. To foster sustainable development, she said, a global partnership needs to be developed, involving young people in decision-making. Drawing from her experience in humanitarian activities, she emphasized the need for a vision and for solutions that come from the heart. How can a state assure the security of its citizens, she asked, if one does not care for one's own neighbor?





that simultaneously affect societies in our time. In the religious sphere one sees tendencies toward sectarian identities and extremism, while at the same time interreligious dialogue is increasingly, widely recognized. In the sphere of political governance one sees a resurgence of nationalistic identities, while the rise of globalization challenges the limits of the centuries-old Westphalian system of nation-states. Transnational tendencies foster the development of regional entities like the EU or the EEU, or the UN itself. Many people today identify with a broader spirituality that does not replace but complements their religious roots. The Sustainable Development Goals themselves are transnational goals, and all governments increasingly recognize the influence of NGOs and civil society. In particular, he concluded, faith-based organizations are becoming a major factor in world affairs around the world.



Mr. Jack Corley, president of UPF-Europe, then spoke about the 15 years he spent in Russia and the former Soviet Union, from his base in Moscow. He recalled his experiences at the time of transition between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras at the beginning of the 1990s, saying Westerners should give more credit to Russians and former Soviet citizens themselves for this peaceful transition and for the challenges they faced in transforming their society. Democracy in the West did not come easily, he said. Core

values of freedom and equality certainly should be learned, but not **everything from today's liberal democracies** should be copied. He went on to introduce some of the projects UPF is developing in Europe, from conferences promoting the family to youth programs or consultations with political leaders at the UN in Geneva and Vienna or the British Parliament.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF International, gave a final reflection on two historical trends, toward universalism and toward particularism,

The session ended with the reading by **Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky**, an academic advisor to UPF-Eurasia, who had spoken in the first panel, of a statement from conference participants representing the result of speeches and discussions, calling for dialogue and a new start in relations between the countries and peoples of Europe and Eurasia.





«Europe and Eurasia Dialogue: Building Trust and Securing Cooperation for Sustainable Development»

Declaration of the conference at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna October 31, 2015

We, the participants of the international conference on “**Europe and Eurasia Dialogue: Building Trust and Securing Cooperation for Sustainable Development**”, stress the importance of Europe and Eurasia’s cooperation to bring peace and stability in the region and to overcome fundamental crises, as well as the importance to engage the cultural and religious dimensions in dialogue to create better mutual understanding and to complement political approaches to conflict resolution.

The Universal Peace Federation, as an international faith based NGO, advocates universal values of peace, cooperation and solidarity, which are to further enhance the Europe-Eurasia dialogue with the goal of promoting a better understanding of the values, interests and motivations of the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Europe.

To reduce tension in relations between Russia, Ukraine and Europe through furthering public dialogue based on commonly shared values, and to support official political efforts aimed at normalizing relations between Russia, other Eurasian countries and European nations, we strongly support unconditional readiness for dialogue and cooperation of all countries and peoples involved.

This, in turn, will enhance opportunities for European and Eurasian cooperation, and will help Europe and Russia jointly meet challenges and opportunities of the Asia Pacific economic integration, which gains momentum. Better relations between Europe and Eurasia will also help them meet common security challenges and threats, such as ISIS, the Syrian crisis, etc.

To overcome the lack of mutual trust, and further develop security and cooperation, we thus call for a new start in relations between the countries and peoples of Europe and Eurasia.

As our conference also aims at placing the Europe & Eurasia Dialogue in the context of the overall objectives of sustainable development recently announced by the United Nations, we call on all stakeholders to support the UN Agenda till 2030 for the SDGs. We call upon governments and representatives of the civil society to join the effort to implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which focus on economic, social and environmental development.