

Balkan regional inauguration of IAPP in Pristina, Kosovo - 100+ attend

Jacques Marion
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Pristina, Kosovo—More than 100 participants attended the Balkans regional inauguration of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP).

The attendees of the European Leadership Conference, which took place on September 23 and 24, 2017, included the former presidents of Albania, Croatia and Kosovo, the speaker of the Assembly of Macedonia, 20 parliamentarians and former parliamentarians, and scholars and NGO leaders.

The Universal Peace Federation held the conference under the theme “Culture and Peace in the Balkans: The Role of Parliamentarians.”

The main event was held in a hall at the Assembly of Kosovo (the national legislature) on the afternoon of September 23. The conference continued at the Hotel Nartel on the following morning.

On the morning of September 23, the new Kosovan prime minister, H.E. Ramush Haradinaj, welcomed a delegation from UPF to his office. He spoke about his efforts for peace and reconciliation in Kosovo and inquired about the UPF involvement in peacebuilding between North and South Korea.

The chair of the Kosovan Assembly, H.E. Kadri Veseli, organized a luncheon at a traditional restaurant in Pristina for former Albanian President Alfred Moisiu, former Croatian President Stjepan Mesić, former Kosovan President Fatmir Sejdiu, Speaker of the Macedonian Assembly Talat Xhaferi, and the UPF delegation led by UPF Chair Dr. Thomas Walsh.

In the afternoon, in a beautiful hall at the Kosovan Assembly, the conference began with a session on the theme “A Shared Cultural Heritage, a Common Base for Peace and Stability in the Balkans.” The moderator was Mr. Jack Corley, the chair in Eurasia of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization affiliated with UPF. Dr. Thomas Walsh gave the opening remarks, describing the recent work of UPF and the launch of the IAPP throughout the world, then gave the podium to the three former Balkan presidents.

President Alfred Moisiu from Albania reflected on Balkan history, called on the Balkan people to select leaders of integrity, and asked for restraint in relation to Kosovo from the Serbian leadership.

President Fatmir Sejdiu of Kosovo said that considering the real value of Kosovo’s cultural heritage is the way to foster cooperation and sustainable peace in the region. He said that he’d rather see culture in politics than politics without culture.

H.E. Stjepan Mesić, who was the final president of the Republic of Yugoslavia and served two terms as president of Croatia, stated, with the wisdom of experience, that security and stability in Europe will come not through guns and armies but through the equal treatment of nations, dialogue and communication, and non-interference in internal matters.

The two final speakers represented Russia and Europe. Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky, an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), expressed that IAPP values and objectives would be the most useful for the political leaders of his country and Kosovo in finding a common base for their political perspectives regarding the Balkans.

Dr. Walther Lichem, an Austrian diplomat and the former director of the Department of International Organizations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry, concluded the session by discussing the importance of a societal approach to nation-building and the need to assess the evolving nature of one's social identity.



The second session featured a distinguished panel of current and former parliamentary leaders who spoke on the topic “Inter-parliamentary Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation: The Role of Parliamentarians.” The moderator, Jacques Marion, vice president of UPF-Europe, invited participants to watch a video describing the launch of IAPP throughout the world in 2016 and at the World Summit 2017 in Korea. Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, president of UPF for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, introduced briefly the life and vision of the UPF founders and some of the practical projects which they initiated around the world, such as the Japan-Korea Undersea Tunnel.

Hon. Jakup Krasniqi, former president of the Kosovan Assembly and also a former acting president of Kosovo, spoke of the destiny of his country as a member of the European Union and called on parliamentarians to develop a new spirit and establish new partnerships. Hon. Talat Xhaferi, the current speaker of the Macedonian Assembly, who had just arrived from the Macedonian capital, Skopje, expressed optimism for the new political era in his country, spoke of the need to focus on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and underlined the importance of bilateral and multilateral parliamentary diplomacy to tackle challenges and not repeat mistakes of the past.

Professor Anto Domazet from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a former minister of finance and a member of the House of Representatives, gave an overview of the current economic and political factors for regional cooperation among Balkan nations. Describing the constraints limiting the region's economic development, he concluded on the challenge of adopting a market system without increasing inequalities.

Hon. Slobodan Petrovic, a recently re-elected parliamentarian and former vice president of the Assembly of Kosovo—the only one among 10 Serbian minority parliamentarians to willingly cooperate with the Kosovan government—emphasized the need for integrity in this difficult political climate, and for reconciliation between the Albanian and Serbian communities and other minorities in Kosovo.

The last speaker, Dr. Dashmir Shehi from Albania, a member of Parliament and former minister of labor, gave a passionate speech suggesting that Balkan nations that do not belong to the European Union create their own market system and unite their borders, energy systems, telecommunications, etc.

At the end of the session, the title of Ambassador for Peace was bestowed by Dr. Thomas Walsh and Dr. Katsumi Otsuka upon Croatian President Mesić and Macedonian Speaker Xhaferi.

The IAPP Inaugural Resolution was then read by the moderator, and a commemorative photo was taken with the panel and main leaders in the hall to celebrate the launch of IAPP in the Balkans, after which everyone signed the IAPP Inaugural Resolution displayed onstage.

All participants were then invited to the Hotel Nartel for dinner and a cultural performance. Mrs. Hatixhe Hoxha, the chair of UPF-Kosovo and the conference host, greeted the audience and spoke about her engagement as a woman leader in politics. Then Hon. Gaço Apostoli, the UPF chair in Albania, sang a Beatles song, and a young Japanese opera singer charmed everyone with a powerful rendition of the Puccini aria O mio babbino caro. The evening ended with traditional songs performed in the Croatian and Albanian languages by a well-known Kosovan artist, a blind man, who delighted the Albanian audience and brought to the stage President Mesić, President Moisiu and Speaker Xhaferi for a heartfelt singalong.

On September 24 in the morning, the conference continued at the Hotel Nartel. The theme of the first session, moderated by Mr. Giuseppe Cali, president of FFWPU in Italy and Southern Europe, was “Strengthening the Family, Core of the Balkans’ Cultural Heritage.” Panelists were asked to offer their perspective on the role of the family in the Balkans as a base for social solidarity and reconciliation.

Dr. Saemira Pino, former Albanian deputy minister of education, spoke about the family’s capacity to foster “either peacemakers or warmongers” and emphasized the responsibility of Ambassadors for Peace to raise families that are open to other cultures. Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, director of the United Nations Offices of the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP), another organization affiliated with UPF, spoke about the current pervading trend to “deconstruct the family” and about the various forms it takes in UN documents and EU policies on the family, and its influence on social norms.

Professor Daut Demaku from Kosovo, the founder of the Center for Positive Thinking, who has authored numerous inspirational books, spoke about the destined role of women in bringing peace to the family and to society. The final speaker was Mr. Jack Corley, FFWPU Eurasia chair, who spoke on character education, emphasizing the need to base academic or technical school education upon the education of heart and norms, so that mastery and skills will be rooted in a loving and ethical personality.

The last session of the conference, moderated by Mr. Ali Lacej, coordinator of the Albanian Peace Council, was on “Building an Environment of Shared Prosperity for Future Generations.” The first speaker, Hon. Ismajl Kurteshi, a member of the Kosovan Assembly, presented his vision of how ethnic groups in the Balkans could live in harmony despite religious differences—like Albanians whose religions are different but who are able to coexist and cooperate with each other based on common nationality. Then Hon. Sead Šahman, a young member of Parliament from Montenegro, expressed his conviction about the need for dialogue in the Balkans, insisting that youth policies should be based on universal values and human rights.

Ms. Anita Mitić, the Serbian president of Youth Initiative for Human Rights, in a heartfelt talk described how young people in the Balkans too often have inherited prejudices and hatred from their parents. She pleaded for more involvement of the young generation in such a peace conference and peace activities. “The millennials will turn 18 years old in 2018 and become voters!” she warned, referring to the generation born right after the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The final speech was given by Mr. Gani Rroshi, secretary general of UPF-Albania, who explored the root causes of conflict within individuals and the process of hurt and revenge, which he said we had the task to overcome. He then showed a video on the launch of the Peace Road 2017 project and explained the plan of UPF to launch Peace Road Balkans 2018 as a means for young people to build bridges between Balkan nations.

To close the conference, Mr. Hydajet Hyseni, an early Ambassador for Peace in Kosovo and former member of the Kosovan Assembly, who was instrumental in organizing the event, reflected on the political situation in Kosovo and presented his vision on the way parliamentarians and the IAPP could benefit his country.

Then Jacques Marion briefly summarized the conference. Quoting French economist Jacques Attali’s statement that altruism would be the central value of our economic future, he said that altruism, the core value of UPF and IAPP, is meant not only to be promoted through sound family policies but also to be the guiding principle for nations to transcend national interest and focus on the public whole—a task that is in the hands of IAPP and its network of parliamentarians.

The conference ended with the awarding of Ambassador for Peace certificates by Dr. Walsh and Dr. Otsuka to six participants: Dr. Dashamir Shehi, an Albanian member of Parliament; Ms. Anita Mitić, the Serbian president of Youth Initiative for Human Rights; Professor Afet Mamuti, a law professor from Macedonia; Mr. Xhevdet Amuli, the former president of the Vasnya Soccer Club in Shkodra, Albania; Mr. Skander Krasniqi, the founder and CEO of the Kosovo Press Agency; and Dr. Kujtim Pracaku, a poet, former member of the Kosovan Assembly, and leader of the Roma community in Kosovo.

The presence of the former presidents of Croatia, Albania and Kosovo, as well as the Macedonian speaker of Parliament, who were cared for by state protocol throughout the conference, brought not only prestige but also a sense of wisdom and dignity to this inauguration of the International Association for Peace in the Balkans. The plan for Peace Road Balkans 2018 was widely approved by participants. Plans for Soccer for Peace projects were discussed with Serbian Ambassador for Peace Sinisa Ruzicic, who has led a European soccer team to victory three years in a row at the Wongu Peace Cup in Korea.

UPF-Europe Vice President Jacques Marion and UPF-Albania President Gani Rroshi were interviewed live on the main TV show Good Morning Kosovo on the morning of September 23.