

Brief Report on our Meetings with VIPs in the Balkans

By Jacques Marion - February 11 – 14, 2023

Dear Leaders

Greetings from Tirana, Albania.

I would like to briefly report about our meetings with VIPs in the Balkans.

Dr Otsuka and I began this trip by attending events at the UN in Geneva for the UPR meeting on Japan (Jan. 31), the Interfaith Harmony Week meetings at the UN in Vienna (Feb. 3) and at the World Council of Churches in Geneva (Feb. 6). All these meetings have already been well reported. Suffice to say they were very significant, and they testified to the strong foundation of UPF in Switzerland and Austria.

1/ SERBIA

On January 9th, together with Dr Otsuka, Mark Brann and Gani Rroshi, we met with Ambassador Christopher Hill at his official residence in Belgrade. We had a very friendly and instructive meeting, as he could share some of his experience and perspective working with Balkans leaders in the current context of conflict, particularly between Serbia and Kosovo.

On January 10th we were invited to lunch by former Serbian President Boris Tadic, who had attended the Summit-ILC last August in Korea. President Tadic expressed his desire to cooperate with UPF on “peace and reconciliation in the Balkans”. We had a long discussion with him, he explained with an open mind the Serbian viewpoint on Kosovo, and we expect to continue deepening this connection with him. We also had the opportunity to meet with some of the main Peace Ambassadors from Serbia, who have been attending UPF meetings over the last few years. They expressed their interest in UPF activities, and suggested ways in which we could work together.



With US Ambassador Christopher Hill at the US Embassy Residence in Belgrade, Serbia – Feb. 9



With former Serbian President Boris Tadic Belgrade, Feb. 10

2/ KOSOVO

On June 11th, we moved to Kosovo, where we met with Prime Minister Kurti, and in the evening with former President Sejdiu. Prime Minister Kurti, as usual, welcomed us as “friends of Kosovo”. He shared with us some of the progress Kosovo is making in terms of attracting foreign investment and in terms of exports. He invited his Department Director for IT development to give us a brief report, expressing their interest in developing relations with South Korean enterprises. In the evening, we met with President Fatmir Sejdiu, former president of the country, a longtime friend of UPF, very supportive of our work in the Balkans.

On February 12, after the Sunday Service given by Dr Otsuka, I had the opportunity to visit Mitrovica, the city that symbolizes the current tragedy of Kosovo: Since the war in 1999, the Serb and Kosovar (Albanian) communities that used to live together are divided on each side of the river. A barricade is filtering the passage on the main bridge of the town, manned by NATO mission troops (KFOR).



Meeting with Prime Minister Albin Kurti
Pristina, Kosovo, Feb. 11



Dinner meeting with former Kosovo President
Fatmir Sejdiu, Feb. 11



Sunday Service with Kosovo members
Feb. 12



On the bridge marking the division between Serb
and Kosovar communities in Mitrovica - with Peace
Ambassadors (including the main imam) Feb 12

3/ ALBANIA

On June 13th, at the beautiful lake near the Albanian city of Shkodra, we met with President Moisiu, former President of Albania, and with President Vujanovic, former president of Montenegro and founder of the Podgorica Club. We agreed on hosting a joint UPF-Podgorica Club conference this coming October in North Macedonia. President Vujanovic considers that the conference we held together in Vienna last November was an encouraging success.

The cooperation with UPF provides a platform for the Club to meet and express their position on peacebuilding in the Balkans. At the same time, it reinforces bonds between Balkans leaders. We are working on a concrete project for the conference in October.

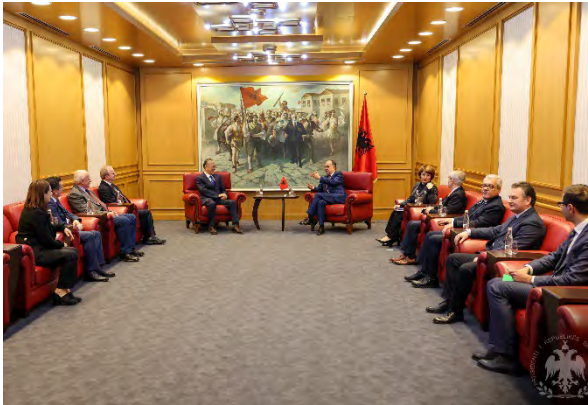
On June 14th, we had an unexpected call from Albanian President Begaj, who wanted to know more about the upcoming Summit in Korea. We were received very officially at the presidency, as UPF is a very respected organization in Albania, due to the testimony of high-level Peace Ambassadors working in official positions in the country.



Lunch meeting with President Moisiu (Albania) and President Vujanovic (Montenegro) in Shkodra, Albania – Feb. 13



Meeting with members at the Shkodra Center Feb. 13



Meeting with President Begaj of Albania Tirana – Feb. 14



With President Begaj of Albania Tirana – Feb. 14

Our trip is continuing with an upcoming Forum in Berlin. More later.

Jacques Marion