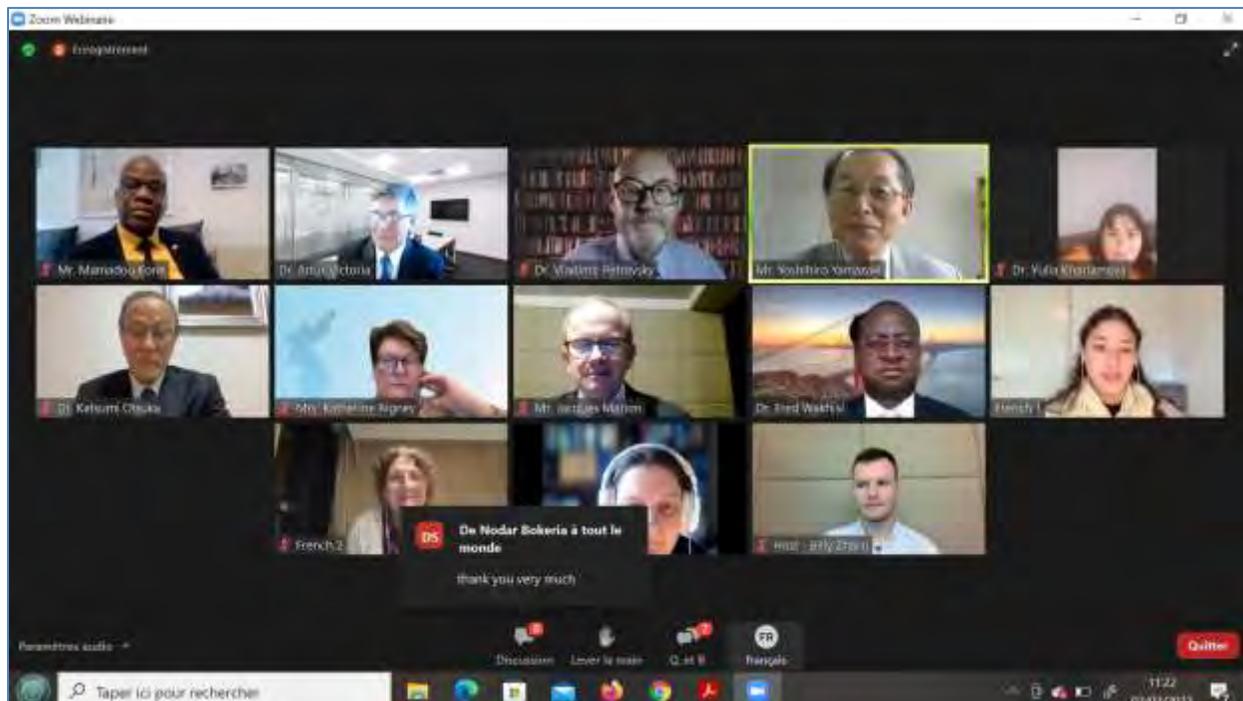


Think Tank 2022 Forum Europe and Middle East, February 2: IAAP Session

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Europe and the Middle East - In the fourth Think Tank 2022 webinar, academicians discussed a highway that would circle the globe.

The February 2 session, "The International Highway Project: A Global Peace Road - Northeast Asia - Europe - Africa," was held jointly by the Europe-Middle East and African branches of UPF's International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP).

The eight webinars of the Think Tank 2022 Global Forum were held from February 1 to 3 as a precursor to the events of World Summit 2022, which would be held in Seoul, South Korea, and online from February 11 to 13.

The Think Tank 2022 webinars were held not only in Europe and the Middle East but also in Asia, Africa, and the Americas by UPF and its associations. Several of the online sessions were held jointly with UPF associations from other continents.



[Mr. Yoshihiro Yamazaki, Liaison Director, Institute for Peace Policies for Europe and Middle East, Japan](#) The session began with Yoshihiro Yamazaki, IAAP coordinator for Europe and the Middle East, explaining that the association was founded in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in 2020 as a forum for academicians, scholars and thinkers to contribute to a world of peace.

In the two years since its founding, he said, IAAP has organized dozens of conferences, especially on peacebuilding in Northeast Asia and on the Korean Peninsula. One of IAAP's focuses has been the International Highway Project (IHP), also called the Peace Road Project.

A short video titled Peace Road 2018 was shown.



[Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Chief Academic Researcher, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Science, Russia](#) The session's moderator was Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky, chief researcher at the Russia-China Center at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

When the International Highway first was advocated by UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon in 1981, some considered it to be merely visionary, Dr. Petrovsky said. Today, quite a few governments are taking its vision seriously, as various major infrastructure works are being planned and developed around the world. In his proposal, Dr. Moon suggested to connect

Japan, Korea and China with an undersea tunnel and highway links. It is thus reasonable to discuss how China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could fit into this vision, Dr. Petrovsky said.



[Dr. Artur Victoria, Specialist on China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative, Portugal](#) As an expert on China's BRI, Dr. Artur Victoria of the Autonomous University of Lisbon, Portugal, explained that the BRI, adopted in 2013, is a transcontinental, long-term policy and investment program, aiming at infrastructure development and economic integration with a network of roads, railways and maritime routes. It has invested in about 70 countries and international organizations. The BRI effectively addresses an infrastructure funding gap in Asia, estimated to top US \$26 trillion, Dr. Victoria said.

Like the original Silk Road, several regional initiatives include Central and Western Asia, the Middle East and Europe. China has planned six railway corridors in partnership with Pakistan, Mongolia, Russia, India and the Indochina Peninsula. It also plans a maritime road linking China's harbors to Southeast Asia, India, Africa and Europe, Dr. Victoria said.

He said that China's policy of coordination and connectivity of infrastructure, trade and financial integration is expected to boost trade and investment and people-to-people connectivity. China also plans a link to the Arctic routes; a digital Silk Road of undersea cables; and 5G telecommunication systems.

China has presented the BRI as an open arrangement in which all countries concerned are welcome to participate. Dr. Victoria said he is hopeful, as China has concluded bilateral agreements with many countries worldwide, including many NATO member states.

Dr. Victoria pointed out that countries are supposed to pay for the infrastructure themselves. China provides technical assistance and lends money, if necessary. However, economic sustainability, debt traps and future sovereignty sometimes are overlooked by policymakers of the countries concerned.

Essential to the further development of the BRI are, among others, respect for national sovereignty, bilateral and multilateral agreements in economic and financial areas, environmental management and cooperation for world peace, happiness, mutual prosperity and universal values, Dr. Victoria concluded.

Dr. Petrovsky commented that China's BRI is a combination of large-scale projects. Other countries that join in should align their own vision with the Chinese initiative. He assumes that Russia and other European countries are interested in the development of an unblocked road and railway networks across Asia and Eurasia rather than in the Maritime Silk Road.



[Dr. Yulia Kharlamova, Associate Professor, Russian University of Transport, Russia](#) Dr. Yulia Kharlamova, an associate professor at the Russian University of Transport, began her presentation by referring to Pyotr Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, an outstanding Russian geographer and academician who, early in the 19th century, paid great attention to the problems of creating and controlling transport routes. He actually predicted what he called a "transcontinental" or intercontinental organization in which Russia would play an important role.

Today we can see a paradigm shift from geopolitics to geo-economics, Dr. Kharlamova said. New players have stepped into the foreground and must be taken into account. Russia, for instance, is a key player in Eurasia, and a natural bridge between Europe and Asia. Given its geographical position, Russia can be a balance holder between Europe and Asia. International cooperation and communication will help regions to develop economically, politically and socially. Vast territories such as Russia require good communication. Transit territories such as Russia tend to mitigate the impact of negative political and economic processes by trying to mediate and bring the far ends closer. Dr. Kharlamova believes Russia should be open to international structural works, especially on land, as they allow regions to develop.

Dr. Petrovsky added that China has proposed to countries that they should align with each other's policies. Russia, therefore, needs to review all projects of international transportation corridors - such as the Bering Strait tunnel/bridge project and the BRI - to see how they can be integrated in a development strategy. He also mentioned the increasingly accessible Northern Sea Route, which China and many countries want to use to transport goods between Asia and Europe. Russia should decide what to do, which projects to join alongside the International Highway Project, he said, so as not to miss this boat.



[Mr. Mamadou Kone, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Mali in Austria](#)

H.E. Mamadou Kone, honorary consul of the Republic of Mali in Austria, said that for governments to come to sustainable solutions, and for people to live peacefully, the economic, political and social needs and aspirations of the local people must be taken into consideration. This is true on all levels of governance, he said, also when countries engage in international cooperation and infrastructure projects. These needs may differ from one country, one continent, to the other. However, there are some basic needs that always must be met first. Mr. Kone showed some slides indicating which infrastructure is required in Mali to meet the basic needs of the population.

For instance, though Mali has no shortage of foreign-trained doctors, many people die of curable diseases because of a lack of hospitals and medical equipment, he said.

Another case in point: Farmers in Mali, who make up 80 percent of the population, can barely feed more than their own families, due to a lack of modern tools of production. Even when production is high, as is the case with tomatoes and mangos, much perishable produce is lost due to a lack of cold-chain infrastructure and transportation. In such a situation, export-oriented trade can never take off.

Collaboration in terms of infrastructure would improve the quality of life of the local people. However, many conflicts in Africa result from political instability, because the needs of the population have not been met, Mr. Kone said.

Most importantly, the much-needed international transportation infrastructure projects must be developed in the broader context of human security, human development and the needs of the population. Projects like the International Highway Project are aimed precisely at improving people's lives.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Petrovsky said that 40 years after the International Highway Project was advocated, there is a need to place it into a broader context. Large-scale transportation projects of this kind must be considered in terms of sustainability and environment. He suggested that a small interdisciplinary research team of experts from countries interested in this project be organized. A publication of the findings of small-scale targeted research into a number of topics may give rise to further discussion.

He advised that we should revisit the International Highway Project's original spiritual and moral foundation. We also should review what has been achieved so far and consider how, in the current context, the IHP can tie in with other like-minded projects, such as the BRI.

Moreover, Dr. Petrovsky said, we need to offer a specific country-based economic rationale for this project, in terms of development strategy of the countries concerned. We could propose a configuration of other stakeholders in this project, such as international financial institutions and special programs like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The academic community, NGOs and other stakeholders also could contribute to the establishment of a special IHP Foundation to raise funds, Dr. Petrovsky said.

Mr. Yamazaki, the IAAP coordinator for Europe and the Middle East, said he appreciated the practical steps suggested by Dr. Petrovsky. In a year, he said, we may have a global convention involving all the parties concerned, which include not only the BRI but also the Group of Seven's Build Back Better World and the European Union's Gateway Programme. UPF's guiding value principles of interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal values may serve as an ideological compass for more peaceful and harmonious collaboration among the stakeholders, he said.

Finally, Mr. Yamazaki reminded the audience that UPF co-founder Reverend Moon proposed the International Highway Project in 1981 with the conviction that communism and the Cold War soon would cease to exist. If academics in those days had taken his vision and put it into constructive discussions, still-pervasive hostilities and antagonisms among nations could have become a thing of the past.