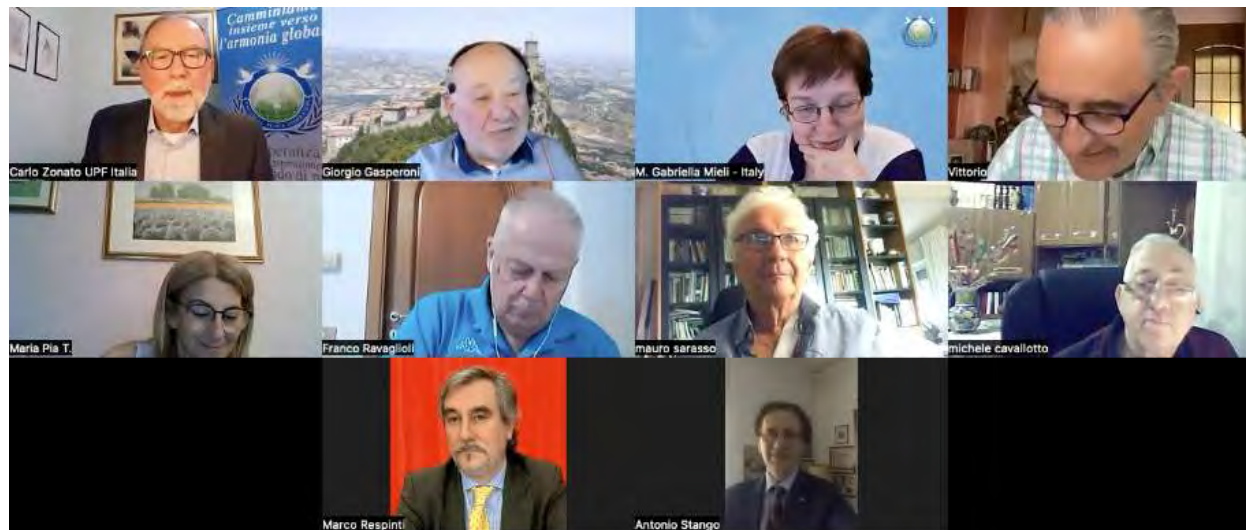


UPF Rome, Italy's Fifth Italian Peace Forum Focuses on Western Balkans

Carlo Zonato
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Rome, Italy -- The "tensions that often flare up" on the Balkan Peninsula were the topic of the fifth Italian Peace Forum of 2023.

"The Western Balkans between Prospects for European Integration and Risks of New Conflicts" was the title of the talk given on June 26, 2023, by **Dr. Antonio Stango**, an Italian political analyst, writer and editor who also is the founder and president of the Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU).



UPF-Italy President **Carlo Zonato** opened the meeting by thanking Dr. Stango for joining the forum. He noted that Dr. Stango "has been working on human rights for over 40 years internationally, starting in 1987 when he founded the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights with [the politician and intellectual] Paolo Ungari."

As well as being the founder and president of FIDU, Dr. Stango is also a UPF Ambassador for Peace, Mr. Zonato added.

"We are particularly interested in the Balkans," Mr. Zonato said, "because it is one of the areas where both UPF International and UPF Europe have invested the most." He mentioned the UPF Peace Embassy that was built in Tirana, Albania, and said that "many institutional figures, heads of state and former heads of state, prime ministers and former prime ministers" from the Balkans have agreed to cooperate with UPF.

"There was a notable presence" of Balkan leaders, including Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Kosovo, at Peace Summit 2023, which was held in Seoul, South Korea, in May, Mr. Zonato said.

"UPF is trying to provide a platform for dialogue, for closeness, for mutual understanding, to try to dampen the tension as much as possible and create opportunities for rapprochement and cooperation. In that sense, we are particularly interested in [Dr. Stango's presentation]," Mr. Zonato said.

Dr. Stango said: "The topic, as you said, is very topical, and I think it is of great interest to everybody, not only in Europe but probably globally.

"Meanwhile, let's remind ourselves what is meant by the Western Balkans. When we talk about the Balkans in general, we mean an entire peninsula and also some adjacent countries. One historical ... definition of the Balkans includes as far as Romania and Bulgaria, which by other textbooks is the famous Danubian Balkan region.

"But when we refer to the Western Balkans alone, we basically mean the former Yugoslavia and Albania.

"However, the part that causes us the most concern is only a number of states that were born out of the

dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, because two of them, as we know, have joined the European Union. Therefore, they follow other political logic: high democratic development, reconstruction of the rule of law, respect for fundamental freedoms and also peaceful solution to any disputes. So, Slovenia and, a few years later, Croatia are part of the European Union in their own right.



"That leaves -- from what used to be Yugoslavia -- Serbia and Kosovo. Here there is a big part of the problem, because Kosovo arose from a former autonomous region of Serbia and is recognized as a state by more than 100 member states of the United Nations, including almost all of those in the European Union, including Italy, but it is not part of the United Nations and especially not recognized by Serbia, which continues to consider it its own province.

"Then there is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has a very complicated institutional situation, a very complicated constitutional arrangement, which we will mention [in] a little bit.



"There is North Macedonia, which has had great difficulty even getting its name recognized for many years. There is Montenegro, and there is Albania. Albania was not part of the former Yugoslavia and has a somewhat different history.

"However, all these countries have a number of entanglements with each other, often very complicated and sometimes -- especially, as I mentioned, between Serbia and Kosovo -- the political crisis is likely to escalate into more than just a crisis, but even into an armed conflict.

"So, we talk about tensions that often resurface, flare up in that area of the world, as well as the tensions that persist in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Link to the complete text: bit.ly/3DeU3Io