

## UPF-EUME and ISCP: Former Prime Ministers Discuss Future of European Union

Thomas Walsh  
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London, United Kingdom -- A "Peace Talks" webinar was held on the theme "Is There a Future for the European Union and the Rules-Based Global Order?"

The webinar was organized on June 26, 2020, by UPF of Europe and the Middle East and the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP), a UPF project. The online conference had more than 2,600 viewers from 58 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, the chair of the UPF International Secretariat, gave the opening remarks. Both the rules-based world order established after World War II and the European Union system of close intergovernmental cooperation and integration are under such severe strain as to cast doubt on their future viability. In both cases, he said, increasing preoccupation with national self-interest and reduced willingness to cooperate together for the common good would appear to be the key destabilizing factor. What are the key issues threatening to tear the EU apart or at least to greatly reduce its effectiveness? How can these issues be resolved, if at all? Even more important, can the global rules-based system survive, and how can the EU best adapt itself so as not only to ensure its own survival but also to bolster the global rules-based system in its fight for survival?

### Panelists

Rita Payne, a former Asia editor for the BBC World News (TV) and president emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association, served as the moderator for the panel and introduced the panelists.

H.E. Romano Prodi, the prime minister of Italy (1996-1998 and 2006-2008) and president of the European Commission (1999-2004), spoke first. Support for authoritarianism is on the rise globally. The

consensus around liberal democracy is slipping, but Europe remains the world's example of this doctrine. Although this moment is delicate, the European Union has weathered many crises and, in general, has gained power and stability over the last few decades. The former prime minister spoke highly of Europe's social and economic cooperation, but was less bullish on defense and foreign policy cooperation. Increased influence in the tech sector by authoritarian countries, especially China, calls for a European response. He called for clearer rules regarding joint European efforts on foreign policy issues.

H.E. José Manuel Barroso, the prime minister of Portugal (2002-2004) and president of the European Commission (2004-2014), spoke next. H.E. Barroso spoke of the sovereign debt crisis, when most commentators agreed that the European Union could not come through the crisis intact. The European Union, he contends, is much more resilient than most think. Progress for the EU is incremental, involves significant compromise and, therefore, can be very frustrating even while successful. The multilateral world order has suffered from waning commitment on the part of the United States, he said. The European Union can take up the role of torchbearer for the multilateral world order if the United States continues to falter. Cooperation and competition are not mutually exclusive: It is possible for different political systems to compete for ascendancy while also taking a common approach to international peacekeeping, pandemics and climate change. In conclusion, H.E. Barroso called for wiser leadership on all sides.

H.E. Herman Van Rompuy, the prime minister of Belgium (2008-2009), president of the European Council (2009-2014), chair of the board of the College of Europe (since 2019), spoke next. The pandemic highlights the high level of global interdependence and the fragility of the global system, he said. Trade protectionism is on the rise, especially in the United States, as a result of internal disillusionment with the effects of globalization. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that the European Union is highly dependent on U.S. and Chinese companies for key technological resources, which makes a collapse of international trade particularly threatening. "Geopolitics starts at home," H.E. Rompuy said; the EU needs to develop economic autonomy but not autarky. There is a need to correct the fragilities imposed by globalization, but this is not incompatible with a continued commitment to free international trade. International cooperation is more necessary than ever, he said, with extreme poverty on the rise and the looming threat of climate change.

#### **QandA and closing statements followed:**

In response to a question on the prospects for southeast European nations, such as Albania, for membership in the EU, H.E. Prodi called for greater prioritization for those nations while insisting on clear criteria for membership.

On the "Infodemic" – the global rise in misinformation – H.E. Barroso reiterated the need for media freedom, as well as the need to promote media literacy, with cooperation between the EU, national governments, and civil society.

On the question of tension between European centralization and the desire for autonomy, H.E. Van Rompuy pointed out that the perception of the EU's power often outpaces its actual power; the EU is not a super-state.

On the prospect of a European initiative analogous to China's "Belt and Road," H.E. Prodi said he was optimistic about such efforts, should Europe choose to undertake them.