

World Summit Focuses on Europe and Middle East

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Seoul, Korea—“Challenges Facing Europe and the Middle East” were the focus of Plenary Session V of the 3rd World Summit.

On August 29, 2015, the second day of the three-day international conference taking place at the InterContinental Grand Seoul Parnas hotel, panelists from Europe and the Middle East offered their thoughts on issues, challenges and opportunities that are impacting their regions. Mr. Jacques Marion, the secretary general of UPF-Europe, served as moderator.



Dr. Doudou Diene, chair, U.N. Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, Senegal, shared his thoughts on the challenges facing Europe and the Middle East. The moral or ethical challenge is foremost—namely, how a region so steeped in history and tradition, and which has proclaimed the universality of its values, has lost the ability to deal with diversity? The flow of illegal immigrants is creating enormous social and economic demands that have put a huge strain on hospitals, schools, housing and other public services. Europe is a melting pot of cultures and most recently has been the No. 1 immigration destination for refugees escaping from the conflict in Syria. Extremist right-wing groups, which are gaining in popularity in some countries, are demanding a backlash to illegal immigrants from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa.

Dr. Diene said this issue of immigration challenges Europe to self-reflect on its identity. The rejection of the immigrants and the rise of extremist parties are causing an identity crisis in Europe. This level of intolerance represents not only a rejection of diversity but also a failure to respond to the moral responsibility to help refugees who seek asylum, safety and freedom. “The Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the failure to implement the two-state solution will continue to create many problems” for the entire Middle East region, he said. Lastly, he called on the Muslim countries of the Middle East to demonstrate their compatibility with human rights, in particular, with regard to the persecution of Christians and other minorities. Europe and the Middle East must learn to accommodate and increase their levels of acceptance and diversity, which are based on the spiritual values and principles taught in the Koran and the Bible.



Professor Tihomir Domazet, Croatian Institute of Finance, Croatia, delivered a paper on “Twenty-First Century Economics,” with a focus on small and open economies in Southeast Europe. By 2030, according to Professor Domazet, “the top three economies of the world will be the U.S., China and India.” By 2050, “the growth of the latter two will each be richer than the next five [Indonesia, Germany, Japan, Brazil and the United Kingdom] put together.” The past quarter-century witnessed the greatest explosion of financial innovation the world has ever seen, but the economy collapsed in the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2008, which is considered by many economists to have been the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. While regional integration, according to Professor Domazet, brings economic convergence, at this time convergence in the European Union has stalled.

Many nations, including those of Southeast Europe (SEE) and the Western Balkans, are not attracting the scale of investment needed to finance sustained growth. Income levels are less than one-third those of their richer European neighbors. The global financial crisis triggered financial adjustments across Emerging Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania), including the SEE nations. While working toward regional integration brings a sense of complacency, Professor Domazet warned that another global financial crisis is likely. “The world is defenseless against the next financial crisis,” he said. Therefore there is a necessity to institute a new approach for the 21st century economics. The new paradigm must address the issues of youth, unemployment, energy, the environment, health care, immigration and climate change.

Hon. Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, former president of Parliament, Luxembourg, spoke about the challenges facing Europe. The biggest political challenge facing the European Union, she said, concerns peacekeeping in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia. Quoting former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who earlier this year warned that tensions between Russia and European powers over the Ukraine crisis could result in a major conflict or even nuclear war, she praised the diplomatic process of the European Union. The Euro, which is the official currency in 19 of the 28 member states, has brought a great deal of relief to the confusion of currency exchange. The goal and the official motto of the EU are “Unity in Diversity,” but unification remains a major challenge. The slowdown in economic development and employment have created troubles for the member nations; in particular, the recent events in Greece have strained the alliance. Hon. Hennicot-Schoepges applauded a proposal by Jean-Claude Juncker, current president of the European Commission, to attract new investments and to launch employment initiatives.

She emphasized the importance that ethics plays in business. She said she regretted the phasing out of

compulsory military conscription for the EU. “An opportunity of teaching young people the values of civil service for the whole community [has] disappeared,” she said. The main challenge facing Europe concerns the integration of refugees. She called for strong measures against criminals who exploit human misery, namely, human traffickers, and said that while illegal immigration should be prevented, “a common asylum policy should be implemented.”



Hon. Hilik Bar, deputy speaker of the Knesset, Israel, and chair of the Knesset Caucus for the Resolution of the Israeli-Arab Conflict, outlined his diplomatic plan for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Deputy Speaker Bar, the situation has worsened. “Jerusalem is on the verge of a third intifada, and security experts are predicting an intense escalation in the North, worse than ever before. Israeli deterrence has taken a hit, and Israel is marching inexorably toward international isolation and, worst of all, toward becoming a binational state.” Deputy Speaker Bar described the current government as operating “without long-term goals or a coherent strategy to achieve them, and without any diplomatic vision or horizon.” He said, “Prior to the [Benjamin] Netanyahu era, negotiations were overly focused on the tangible dimension (borders, settlements, dividing Jerusalem and the like), whereas in the Netanyahu era there has been an almost exclusive focus on intangible issues like identity and national recognition, while discussion of those more tangible aspects of the conflict were virtually ignored.” Deputy Speaker Bar emphasized the need to learn from mistakes and “fix our path to peace.” Along with negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, the governing body of the West Bank and Gaza, he recommended that Israel should establish a dialogue with the Arab League and its 22 members. Religious leaders on both sides should be involved in the process. More importantly, “Israel must shake off its political paralysis and rally around a leadership that understands that in the 21st-century Middle East, military force is no doubt necessary, but it is not enough.”

H.E. Antonio Miloshoski, chair, Foreign Affairs Committee, Macedonia, gave a sobering report on the situation of the tide of immigrants coming into Europe from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. The number of refugees leaving Syria alone is more than 4 million. Dr. Miloshoski said, “It is the single largest crisis facing the United Nations.” Each day the numbers are increasing. Officials predict that there will be more than 5 million refugees by the end of 2015, Dr. Miloshoski said. The Syrian war is already in its fifth year, and there seems to be no end in sight. The European Union has not been able to come up with a sustainable solution, nor have the nations of the world been able to handle the challenge. Dr. Miloshoski said, “The burden of this crisis must be shared.” With the winter coming soon, the problems will be exacerbated for the refugees, who face not only the loss of their livelihood, their possessions and their dignity, but also a situation of life or death. “It is more than a Middle East crisis; it is a world crisis,” he said. The consequences are turning even darker as some nations are taking strict measures to prevent further entry of the refugees. For example, Hungary recently announced it will build a wall along its border to keep undocumented refugees out, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Most chillingly, Dr. Miloshoski said, ISIS soldiers are secretly infiltrating with the refugees as “sleepers” until their activation for terrorism by their ISIS leaders.

Hon. Todd Tiahrt, House of Representatives (1995-2011), United States, spoke about the “fundamental pillars that hold up a long-term peaceful society,” which are needed to “sustain peace, opportunity and the ability for humans to flourish.” The pillars are: 1) the family, which is the “smallest form of government” and is the place where “children learn how to live with integrity, honesty, reliability and with love for one another” 2) the rule of law, which provides for a fair and just system to protect the “smallest form of government, the family” 3) the right to private property 4) the economy, which provides the means to support the family and, by extension, the nation, and 5) national security and the lesson of history that peace comes through strength. These five pillars, according to Congressman Tiahrt, are “all intertwined and all necessary for a peaceful future and for advancing human development.”