

Balkans Events Report

November 20-24, 2021

Dear UPF Leaders

Here is a summary report of our visit to the Balkans from November 20 to 24.

1/ Balkans Leadership Conference – Tirana, Albania – November 21, 2021

The Balkans Leadership Conference was jointly held by UPF and the Podgorica Club in Tirana, Albania, on November 20-21, 2021. The purpose of the conference was the Signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Europe & Middle East Chapter of UPF and the Podgorica Club.

The Podgorica Club was founded by President Vujanovic, the first president of Montenegro (2003-2018). At the beginning of 2019, to promote peace and development in the region, he founded this club of former presidents and prime ministers from the seven nations that formed Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia), plus Albania.

We first met with President Vujanovic in 2016 to invite him to Korea. He could not attend the Tirana Summit in 2019 due to health reasons but attended the World Summit 2020 in Korea and agreed to establish a Memorandum of Cooperation with UPF.

After 18 months of delay due to the Covid, we could formalize this Cooperation in Tirana.

Six former heads of state and government from the Balkans were present: From Albania, President Moisiu (2002-2007) and Prime Minister Ahmeti (1991-1992); from Bosnia, President Ivanic (2015-2017); from Croatia, President Mesic (2000-2010); from Kosovo, Prime Minister Çeku (2006-2008) and from Montenegro, President Vujanovic (2003-2018). Significantly, President Micic from Serbia (2002-2004), who could not attend, sent a letter of support to the conference.

After a welcoming banquet for heads of state on November 20, the Conference was held at the Tirana International Hotel on November 21, in two sessions.

The first session on the theme “Cooperating for Peace and Development in the Western Balkans” was dedicated to the Signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between UPF and the Podgorica Club. After speeches from President Moisiu, Dr Otsuka, President Vujanovic, President Mesic and Prime Minister Çeku, the Memorandum of Cooperation was co-signed by Dr Otsuka and President Vujanovic. The plan is to organize two meetings per year, and to cooperate on various projects of common interest.

The second session on the theme “Balkans Peace Initiative and Think Tank 2022” was an opportunity to review UPF activities in the Balkans, centering on the 2019 Tirana Summit, and the Think Tank 2022 project for the reunification of Korea. Just like True Mother in 2019 underlined the parallel between the Korean and the Balkan Peninsulas, our peacebuilding activities in Korea are an important testimony for our peacebuilding work in the Balkans.

There were speeches from former President Ivanic of Bosnia, Peace Ambassadors from Kosovo and North Macedonia, and members of parliament from Albania and Serbia. There were all together about 120 Peace Ambassadors from the region, mostly from Peace Councils of Albanian cities.



With Presidents Mesic, Moisiu, Vujanovic and PM Çeku



Conference participants at the Tirana Hotel



Dr Otsuka and President Vujanovic signing the Memorandum



Former President Ivanic (Bosnia) and Prime Minister Ahmeti (Albania)

2/ Opening of the Peace Embassy – November 21, 2021

The Balkans Leadership Conference was organized following Dr Balcomb's decision to inaugurate the Cheonilguk Peace Embassy before the end of this year.

On land purchased from the fund donated to Albania by True Mother in 2015, the Peace Embassy groundbreaking ceremony was held during the Tirana Summit in October 2019. Going through the earthquake at the end of 2019, then the Covid Pandemic, the Peace Embassy was built through many challenges and with great dedication by Albanian members and workers, under active supervision by Dr Balcomb. It was hardly completed when we arrived a few days before the Conference, and the last few days before the ceremony were very intense, round-the-clock working days for the construction crew and our local leaders. But at noon on November 21, it was beautifully ready to welcome VVIPs and Peace Ambassadors.

The mayor of Tirana gave a rousing speech underlining the significance of the building as the "most important of all embassies around" because of its mission for peace in the Balkans. There were also speeches by President Moisiu, the chairwoman of UPF Albania, and the architect of the building who is also a Peace Ambassador.

Seated in the front row, the former heads of state naturally agreed to cut the ribbon, making the inauguration a very significant event in the Balkans which was covered by all the major media in the country.

We tasted the high-tech quality of the 250-seat conference hall when listening to a congratulatory song by a famous Albanian singer, and to speeches by Dr Balcomb and Carolyn Handschin. Dr Balcomb read a message of praise and hope by True Mother.

Internally, the Peace Embassy represents the fruit of True Parents prayers and expectation to establish Cheonilguk in Europe and the Balkans region. It also gave confidence to all dignitaries present that UPF is seriously focusing on their nations. It will be a great center for peace education in a region that sorely needs it.



Holy Salting with leaders – Nov. 20



Inauguration with Balkan former heads of state – Nov. 21



The Mayor of Tirana Erion Viliaj



175 people in the 250-seat auditorium

3/ Visit of North Macedonia and Kosovo – November 23-24

Together with Dr Otsuka, Mark Brann and Gani Rroshi, we shortly visited North Macedonia and Kosovo on November 23 and 24.

At the border of North Macedonia, we learnt that a tragic bus accident a few hours before had killed 47 people, including children, mostly Albanians from North Macedonia. Therefore, North Macedonia was in national mourning during our visit, and we could not meet the President of the Assembly as planned.

We met with the Mayor of Tetovo, the largest Albanian-populated city in North Macedonia, who introduced us to a professor from Southeast European University (SEEU), the main Albanian University in the country. She expressed a strong desire to cooperate with UPF to develop a Peace Studies program – which they don't have in the country.

In Kosovo, we met with current Prime Minister Albin Kurti, who represents a new, young generation of political leaders. Familiar with UPF for attending several of our meetings, including the Tirana Summit, he welcomed us warmly and expressed his gratitude for UPF's support to Kosovo. He agreed to attend the Summit 2022 in Korea.

That morning we also visited Kosovo's top private university, University of Business and Technology (UBT). We were welcomed by their main staff and faculty professors. In the conversation, it became clear that they also would be very interested to develop a program of Peace Studies with UPF.

Since Dr Walsh, at True Mother's request, is currently developing a Peace Studies program with Dr Ward at UTS, these two meetings in the Balkans pointed to a promising base for cooperation. This can also be a base for cooperation with the Podgorica Club of former heads of state in the region.



With Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Kosovo – Nov. 24



With UBT University leaders in Kosovo – Nov. 24

Conclusion

This visit to the Balkans was our first non-virtual regional UPF event since early 2020. It was also our first regional event in Tirana after the European Summit attended by True Mother in October 2019. True Mother's powerful words at that time, on three occasions, focused on the role of Albania and the Balkans to revive Europe.

She said that "Albania had been the last but became the first" in Europe, and that the Albanian people could play an important role in uniting the Balkans and Europe once they united with True Parents' vision.

Thus, the completion of the Peace Embassy was a remarkable achievement and confronted us anew with our responsibility for the Region. Its inauguration by the former Balkans heads of state, as well as the mayor of Tirana, showed the level we are working on and the level of expectation that our Movement raises in the region.

Our meeting with the Kosovo prime minister, and with the university professors in Tetovo (North Macedonia) and Pristina (Kosovo) who asked to cooperate with UPF to develop Peace Studies in the Balkans, showed that True Mother's vision for Albania and the Albanian people is coming to path.

Moreover, the Albanian diaspora can play a meaningful role in Western Europe, where they live in large numbers. UPF Albania already established Albanians Peace Councils in Germany, the UK, and Italy. Albanian Peace Ambassadors are well integrated into these nations and keep a strong connection with their native country.

Recently the president of our Albanian Peace Council in the UK was elected as a member of parliament in Albania. He spoke this time in Tirana. Two weeks ago, the vice president of the same UK Albanian Peace Council was elected as the new mayor of Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

We plan to establish Albanians Peace Councils in France, Switzerland, and other nations. They may share the blessings of “Shin Albania” with other European nations.

Dear Leaders, we also had UPF leaders’ meetings in Tirana to review our activities and plans for 2022: our continuing focus on Korean Reunification and preparation for Summit 2022, our involvement with the Middle East Peace Initiative, the development of each UPF Association, etc.

But let me end here this report, which I hope will remind you of True Mother’s words in Tirana and of her expectation for our Region.

Thank you for your great efforts in developing UPF activities.

Jacques Marion

Co-chairman, UPF Europe & Middle East