

UPF Co-Sponsors Balkan Leadership Conference in Tirana, Albania

Jacques Marion
April 2, 2022



Tirana, Albania - Former Balkan presidents were among the dignitaries attending the first joint conference of UPF's Europe and Middle East chapter and the Podgorica Club.

The Balkan Leadership Conference, which was held at UPF's Balkan Peace Embassy on April 1 and 2, 2022, was attended by former presidents of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, by prominent parliament leaders and scholars, and by 120 UPF Ambassadors for Peace from Albania.

Founded in 2019 by H.E. Filip Vujanović, the president of Montenegro (2003-2018), the Podgorica Club is a sui generis organization of former heads of state and government from Southeast Europe. In November 2021, UPF used the occasion of its Balkan Peace Embassy inauguration in Tirana to sign with the Podgorica Club a memorandum of cooperation to promote peace and development in the Balkan Peninsula.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the conference focused on the theme of "Peace, Security and Economic Development in the Western Balkans." With the sharp turn taken by the confrontation between Russia and NATO countries, possible consequences in the Balkans are becoming a concern, as post-Cold War conflicts among and within former Yugoslavia nations are still to be resolved.

The conference began on April 1 with a meeting of 40 Albanian Peace Council leaders from Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia in the Tirana International Hotel. The meeting was followed by a welcoming banquet attended by the former heads of state of the region and UPF leaders.



On the morning of April 2, the first session, on the theme "The Importance of Peace and Security in the Western Balkans in Light of Current Developments" was moderated by Hon. Vasilika Hysi, deputy chairwoman of the Albanian Parliament (2017-2021).

The session opened with words of greeting from the co-hosts of the conference: H.E. Alfred Moisiu, president of Albania (2002-2007) and head of the Balkan chapter of UPF's International Summit Council for Peace ([link to speech](#)), and H.E. Filip Vujanović, president of Montenegro (2003-2018) and president of the Podgorica Club ([link to speech](#)). They assessed the regional situation in light of the conflict in Eastern Europe, and were followed by Hon. Mimi Kodheli, a former Albanian minister of defense, currently vice president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly ([link to speech](#)).



Former heads of state who analyzed the political and economic impact that the conflict may have on Western Balkan nations, their integration process into the European Union and their cooperation within the region, were H.E. Stjepan Mesić, president of Croatia (2000-2010) ([link to speech](#)); H.E. Nataša Mičić, president of Serbia (2002-2004) (); H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, president of Kosovo (2006-2010) ([link to speech](#)); and H.E. Mladen Ivanić, president of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2015-2017) ([link to speech](#)).

Unable to attend in person, H.E. Branko Crvenkovski, the president of North Macedonia (2004-2009), gave his speech on video.

Concluding the session, Jacques Marion, the co-chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East, spoke about the UPF vision and role for peacebuilding in the Balkan Peninsula ([link to speech](#)).



The second session was moderated by Carolyn Handschin, president at the United Nations' Geneva offices of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women and vice president of Women's Federation for World Peace International, an organization that is affiliated with UPF. Session 2 had the theme "Economic Cooperation as a Sustainable Precondition for Reconciliation in the Region." Speakers discussed the current state of economic exchanges in the Western Balkans, compared the merits of various projects for economic development and cooperation in the region, and pointed to specific challenges such as the exodus of young people toward European Union countries.



The first speaker was Hon. Talat Xhaferi ([link to speech](#)), president of the National Assembly of North Macedonia (). He was followed by H.E. Vilson Ahmeti, prime minister of Albania (1991-1992) ([link to speech](#)); H.E. Vincenzo Del Monaco, head of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Presence in Albania ([link to speech](#)); Professor Dr. Selami Xhepa, president of the European University of Tirana ([link to speech](#)); and Manjola Vasmatics, president of the Albanian chapter of Family Federation for World Peace (FFWPU) ([link to speech](#)), another organization that is affiliated with UPF. In conclusion, Dr. Michael Balcomb, FFWPU president for Europe and the Middle East, advised Balkan leaders to consider the positive contribution that Western Balkan nations could bring to the European Union ([link to speech](#)).



The afternoon session, moderated by Gani Kroshi, secretary general of UPF for Albania and the Balkans,

was dedicated to the theme "The Future of Youth in the Balkans." Tirana, the capital of Albania, was elected this year as "European Youth Capital for 2022" by the [European Youth Forum](#), a platform of youth organizations in Europe supported by the Council of Europe.

The session was opened by Albania's former President Alfred Moisiu (2002-2007), who advised young people to take leadership roles in their country. He introduced as keynote speaker the young and dynamic mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, who described his administration's vision and plans for youth in the city. Other speakers were Dafina Peci, executive director of the National Youth Congress of Albania, who was the organizer of Tirana's candidacy for the title of Youth Capital ([link to speech](#)). She was followed by Bogdan Pammer, European president of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP), an organization affiliated with UPF ([link to speech](#)); Vladyslav Vakin, a Ukrainian youth leader who testified about the tragedy undergone by his people ([link to speech](#)); and by Erëza Mehmeti, the coordinator of the International Office at Kosovo's University of Business and Technology (UBT), the largest private university in the country ([link to speech](#)).



After the conference, the members of the Podgorica Club adopted a declaration for peace, stability and development in the Western Balkans, expressing their expectation for greater cooperation in the region and for an accelerated process of accession into the European Union.

UPF and the Podgorica Club will pursue their cooperation for peace and development in the Balkan Peninsula.



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Intervention of H.E. Alfred Moisiu at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Alfred Moisiu, President of Albania (2002-2007)

02 April 2022



Your Excellencies Honorable Presidents, Prime ministers and members of the Podgorica Club,

Honorable Mr. Talat Xhaferri, speaker of the Parliament of the North Macedonia Republic,

Honorable parliamentarians & representatives of civil society,

Distinguished Ambassadors for Peace, brothers and sisters,

As a member of Podgorica Club and as a host and in the quality of the Chairman of the High Peace Council for the Balkans, it is a special honor and pleasure for me to welcome you to this very important event that takes place in difficult times, when peace and security are seriously under threat.

This conference was made possible thanks to the successful cooperation between the Universal Peace Federation and the Podgorica Club, which on November 21 last year signed a mutual Cooperation Agreement. I am convinced that this cooperation will play an important role for peace and security in our region and beyond.

This is due to the well-known fact that both of these organizations have been established and are inspired to do their best to forge a spirit of understanding and cooperation in the Balkans, in the interest of strengthening and maintaining peace in the region.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and thanks to my old friends Presidents Vujanovic, Mesić and Sejdiu, and to the Members of the Podgorica Club who are present with us today. I also greet Mr. Talat Xhaferri, Speaker of the Parliament of Northern Macedonia, I greet the Speaker of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Albanian Parliament and my old friend Mrs. Mimi Kodheli, who had the kindness to be here with us and to greet us on behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia and that of Albania.

Amongst us we have representatives of the martyred Bosnian people, as well as honorable representatives of the Serbian people, whom I thank for their participation, as well as for the contribution they give to the benefit of their people and of the Balkans as a whole.

I also thank the leaders of the European Universal Peace Federation who have always supported activities serving peace, security and sustainable development in the Balkans.

These days, we are all troubled by what is happening in Ukraine and we are aware that if we do not take the right measures now, the Balkans could easily be affected, and there are important indications that something like this could happen.

Even though still suffering from the open wounds resulting from the bloody wars that engulfed the Balkans in the 1990s, we are unfortunately witnessing the presence of an old mentality in the minds of some leaders in the Balkans, which can easily be used or misused to awaken and nurture the historical grudges between our peoples, whether ethnic or religious.

We must understand, accept and face this reality, which brings enormous challenges to the younger generation, who do not want to experience what the past generations experienced.

We must not allow the repetition of the painful stories in our region, and for this purpose we must cooperate more

with each other and understand the historical responsibility that our generation has: that of leaving behind, once and for all, the resentment of the past.

For this, courageous, responsible and strong-willed leadership is definitely needed to take responsibility for the mistakes and tragedies of the past and to open new paths for the future, because we need each other more than ever.

It is clear that the aspiration of all the countries of the Western Balkans is their integration into the European Union, and I would like to call on to the European Union to accelerate the process of our countries' membership in the common European family.

We hear good words, but so far everything has remained at the same level. The responsibility for this blockage lies with the EU bureaucracy. Events and bitter experience show that time should be used well and delays and unrealized promises should be avoided.

The war in Ukraine, with the massacres being inflicted on innocent people in the middle of Europe in the 21st century, show that despite scientific developments and humanity's achievements as a whole, the mentality and the way of solving problems have not changed much from those of past centuries. This requires from all of us more care, more work, more responsibility to maintain peace and understanding in our region, which doesn't have a very pleasant history in this regard.

Despite our not having any official power, our word still has its weight for the good of our peoples. We need to raise our voices higher, as our work so far has given us the necessary credibility to be heard more and to be more understandable by our fellow citizens.

I wish this meeting of our Club to have success and accomplishments in attaining our peace-loving goals.

Thanking you all for participating, I wish this conference to send clear messages to all those who 'have ears to hear' and I am convinced that such gatherings serve the common aspiration of all the peoples in the Balkans that is a "Region of Peace, Harmony and Mutual Prosperity."

Thank you!

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Intervention of H.E. Filip Vujanovic at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Filip Vujanovic, President of Montenegro (2003-2018) and president of the Podgorica Club

📅 02 April 2022



Your Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, dear panelists,

The Podgorica Club and the Universal Peace Federation organized this important conference only four months after signing the Memorandum of cooperation here in Tirana. The conference is organized here in the Peace Embassy, through which the UPF sent a message to the Balkan and Korean peninsulas on the lasting and irreplaceable value of peace.

Why are war and instability still not archived topics in the Western Balkans? It is not archived for historical and contemporary reasons. Historical – because of the position of the Western Balkans as a crossroad of globally powerful empires always striving to make this area a part of their territories. Contemporary – because after the fall of great empires, here in the Western Balkans, we still have regional imperialism with the dangerous intention of changing current state borders and building greater national countries.

The tragic intentions of forming great national countries caused a war with catastrophic consequences during the fall of Yugoslavia. Decades after the war, we are still far from each other, interpreting history differently.

We need to reject the ambition to interpret history only and exclusively based on our personal experience of victims and culprits. We should not endanger our present and future with the continuous investigation of the past, with the unavoidable imposition of our stances and negation of the different experiences of others. We need to accept that everyone has their interpretation of history. In this regard, we need to cooperate in coexisting with our differences for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous future. The reality shows that the wounds from the last war during the collapse of Yugoslavia – and even those before it – are still fresh, and that complete reconciliation is not a reality. The future will bring reconciliation, and a precondition for this is to accept the present reality of different interpretations of history.

In securing peace and stability in the Western Balkans, the EU has an immeasurable and irreplaceable role to play.

Only as equal and full members of the EU can the Western Balkan countries reach standards and the quality of life of EU citizens. Just as in the EU – current or reformed – the Western Balkan countries can be in a union of countries where borders don't have value and importance. The existence of state borders is the reason why the history of the Western Balkans was so tragic.

Commemorating the centenary of the beginning of World War One, affirming the value of peace, the EU introduced the Berlin Process, which maintained a strategic partnership with the Western Balkan countries.

During the annual summits of leaders of the EU and the Western Balkans, from Berlin in 2014 to Sofia in 2020, strong cornerstones of the partnership between the two sides were maintained. The Western Balkans get strong support for developing the infrastructure and further cooperation in economy, education, science, and research. That cooperation is an additional and strong recommendation for the membership of the Western Balkan countries in the EU.

Indeed, the most outstanding achievement of such cooperation would be the establishment of the common regional economic area of the Western Balkans. This area is expected to improve the trade price, regional investments, free movement of persons, goods, services, capital, and digital interconnectivity. By signing the Sofia Declaration on a Common Regional Market, the leaders of the Western Balkan countries obliged them to establish a common



economic area, and the Regional Cooperation Council of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process and the CEFTA will coordinate the process.

Instead of a common economic area, Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia have introduced the Open Balkan initiative. Indeed, this initiative was started up with good intentions. Obviously, economic and overall cooperation within the Western Balkans is necessary, and its low level is a severe deficiency.

Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo haven't joined the Open Balkan initiative. This has nothing in common with their relationship with the great project of establishing a common regional economic area. The common economic area of the Western Balkans certainly has its value and justification as an impetus, not a substitute, for European integration, and as an area for all, not just particular countries, of the region. It can be established based on the model proposed by the EU, which our countries have already accepted, but only with the coordination of the above-mentioned regional initiatives, which eliminate the risk of unequal or non-objective interstate governance, interstate governance with which we have negative experiences and memories.

Certainly, of paramount value and importance for Western Balkan security is the membership of Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia in NATO and Kosovo's striving to become a part of the alliance. Within the coalition and its overall security, we strongly support securing the Western Balkans.

In conclusion, it is necessary to remember that we can have a peaceful future and stability in the Western Balkans only through cooperation, mutual respect, equality, and dialogue on open issues.

Thank you for your attention.

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Intervention of Hon. Mimi Kodheli at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Hon. Mimi Kodheli, Vice President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, former Albanian Minister of Defense

02 April 2022

The Importance of Peace and Security in the Balkans in the Light of Current Developments

Talking about the importance of peace and security is like talking about the importance of air and water – one can just not live without them – no matter what the epoch.

However, since the end of the Second World War, the issue of peace and security in Europe and worldwide have never been as complicated as it is now, because there has never been as much at stake as now. We have to admit that unfortunately some of us, or indeed many of us, in the west somehow have taken them for granted. We have to admit sadly that what is happening now in Europe, the invasion of Ukraine and all the tragic consequences, the tremendous and global threat caused by the Russian aggression and of its belligerent policy, the same as the Nazi offensive, did not happen out of the blue.

We have seen hundreds of symposiums, forums and experts debating and examining this issue from hundreds of angles, but what clear is that through its oligarchs from Russia and elsewhere it has bought part of us long before today. In the long run, gradually and systematically they have bought not only huge leisure properties, strategic economic assets, businesses, media and so on, but also politicians and political parties. And while the West was tolerating its acquisition, accepting this “mild” intrusion, Putin was preparing his vicious offensive.

As far as our region is concerned, we are insisting on the fact that the threats and instability that marks the eastern and southern boundaries of Europe, Russia’s aggressive policy, its violation of international laws and order, as well as such other global trends as the waves of extremism and terrorism, are seriously endangering the entire European security and jeopardizing the prosperity and common values upon which the EU is founded.

The Balkan region is, without any doubt, the most vulnerable part of the European structure. This area is still not organically included in the European security architecture, and since in geostrategic policy no empty space is left out, it remains a factor of strategic ambiguity, as well as a territory where third parties see vulnerabilities and opportunities for penetration.

We share the great concern of the European Union and our Western allies regarding the ongoing efforts of the Russian Federation to destabilize the countries of the Western Balkans by interfering in their internal affairs and by opposing democratic processes and the Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Three years ago, in response to the European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2019 on foreign electoral interference and disinformation in national and European democratic processes (2019/2810(RSP)), the Albanian Parliament adopted a resolution in which it express its concern on the issue of electoral interference, that constitutes a major challenge, as it poses serious risks to European democratic societies and institutions, fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law, security, economic wellbeing and, ultimately, Europe’s sovereignty. It has strongly condemned the increasingly aggressive actions of state and non-state actors from third countries seeking to undermine or suspend the normative foundations and principles of European democracies and the sovereignty of all EU accession countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.



In the light of current developments, we stress the importance of strengthening cooperation and unifying our positions in order to consolidate democracy and intensify the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, as a necessity for maintaining security and stability in the Western Balkans, especially in the current moment when it appears too complicated and fragile due to Russia's aggressive policy.

All of the countries of our region, with no exception, must realize that they cannot and should not become "the salmon of Europe" - the fish that swims in the opposite sense of the stream, ignoring the laws of the river, to end at the mouth of the "bear".

In this context, we have rightly expressed strong concern and regret for Serbia's non-engagement with EU sanctions against Russia and its dissociation from EU policies and attitudes, although it has formally opened membership negotiations, which harms the European integration process, not only for itself, but for all the region too.

It is paramount that the attitudes of those aspiring to EU membership must necessarily be in line, not only with the EU acquis, but also with the EU's common foreign and security policy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Euro-Atlantic integration is the guarantee for peace and the future in the Western Balkans.

As Euro-Atlantic integration includes two components, namely EU integration and NATO membership, I would like to try to make some remarks on both and their impact and importance to our security, peace and prosperity.

The EU is the most successful peace project in world history, having put an end to the spiral of endless bloody conflicts between its member states, which have been involved in two world wars (both started in the Balkans) and divided by a cold one.

The union of forces, efforts, resources and collaboration created in Europe a synergy that no individual could generate on his or her own and gave birth to the new Europe we know today.

Each time new countries have joined the European Union, the sphere of peace and stability has also been extended, while economic prosperity and social standards have drastically increased. This has been a powerful incentive for many countries to opt and work for opening accession negotiations.

This is the case for Albania and other countries in the Western Balkans, where the perspective of European integration has been the driving power to build up and consolidate democratic institutions, prosperous and well-functioning democratic societies, as well as in finding peaceful solutions to unresolved issues, thereby contributing to enhanced stability.

Another important incentive that European integration provides as a guarantee for security and a peaceful future is the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Designed to resolve conflicts and foster international understanding, it is based on diplomacy and respect for international rules. The CFSP seeks to preserve peace, strengthen international security, promote international cooperation, develop and consolidate democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It enables the Member States to speak and act as one in world affairs, allowing them to tackle challenges they cannot solve alone and helping ensure security and prosperity for their citizens.

While not being yet an EU member country, Albania has consistently aligned with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy declarations and statements. Meanwhile it plays a proactive role in promoting regional cooperation and good neighborly relations. Regional co-operation, being complementary to European integration, is a priority of Albania's foreign policy.

As you know, the driving and transforming power of the EU and of the European integration process, we talked about so far, is also called "soft power".

However, soft power without strong weapons is not enough to guarantee peace and security in Europe, including that of our country and region. Therefore, the EU's CFSP sees the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the hard power responsible for the territorial defense of Europe and reconciliation.

NATO was founded on the principle of collective defense and, according to Article 5 of the Treaty, it plays the main role in the security of its member states. As such, for Albania as well as for all the WB countries, which are or aspire to be NATO members, the Alliance is a guarantee against the current and potential threats which place at risk the security and values we commonly share.

NATO membership can also have an extraordinary positive impact on the modernization and strengthening of the military capacities and on the consolidation of democracy, stability and peace prospects of a country. Albania is a brilliant example of this influence which has transformed it from a consumer to a serious contributor to the promotion of NATO's principles and to the fulfillment of its goals.

As a NATO member country, Albania participates actively in the decision-taking process of the Alliance, contributing to the elaboration of defense policies and to the solution of issues concerning the security of the Euro-Atlantic area and especially of the Balkans region. In this context, one of Albania's main responsibilities in NATO is to contribute to transforming the fragile and problematic Balkan region into a region of peace, democracy, stability and prosperity.

Actually, NATO's regional map of the Balkans is lacking Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo. Meanwhile, a wave of anti-Atlantic inspiration has affected some of its countries. Therefore, we strongly believe that only the political and ideological cohesion of the NATO member countries, mainly of those which are also EU members, and their serious commitment to the full Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans countries remaining outside, could guarantee the economic progress, democratic achievements, common culture and values of our region, in order to reinvigorate the security and prosperity of Europe as a whole and of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance itself.

The Balkan countries, which have suffered most from the divisions and schisms, distrust and hatred, conflict and lack of clear perspectives, are asked to follow the same stream and trends experienced by all EU countries. In this way, they must mutually support themselves, join forces and promote the principle of all-inclusiveness, as one of the basic principles of the regional cooperation process.

Today, in the light of the latest developments, more than ever, we should implement an active and constructive regional foreign policy, respecting the same principles, sharing the same democratic values and using wisely the converging points and momentums between our strategic interests, aiming at the security, peace and prosperity of our nations.

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Written by H.E. Stjepan Mesic, President of Croatia (2000 - 2010)

02 April 2022



Dear ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants and organizers of the conference, I greet you all.

It is my honor to speak on this important international forum whose goal is strengthening the economic cooperation and stability between the South-Eastern European Countries, which I have always strongly championed.

The economic cooperation between the Balkan countries is the key to economic progress. Unfortunately, it depends on political decisions and peace, not only within the region but also in Europe and globally.

Nowadays, we clearly see the power of politics compared to the power of the economy in the war in Ukraine. Even if this war is not the main conference topic, it can also have a profound negative influence on stability and the region's economic development and beyond. We see the images of devastation, destruction, and losses of innocent lives on our TVs every day. Everyone who respects international law has to help maintain the peace in Ukraine as soon as possible.

South-Eastern Europe recovered from the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic faster than expected, but the prices of food and energy rose. That means that the recovery was weak. Now we have a new inflation pressure and geopolitical events that can threaten the economic recovery of South-Eastern Europe.

The region's economy is faced with the costs of sanctions imposed on Russia, which are pressuring the whole of Europe, but the less developed countries suffer more. These consequences could be catastrophic if the EU doesn't offer totally new economic measures and various subventions, which would immediately help all the countries that don't have economic power for such collective punishments.

The consequences of the Covid19 pandemic and the sanctions imposed on Russia could be felt for decades. We see three disturbing trends: further growth of inflation, loss of the market, investors, tourists, and lowering ambition in sustainable development and green development. The cost of defense is growing, we are again starting to use coal and nuclear energy, and economic discrepancies between individuals deepen.

The region has to use every opportunity to stop such trends. As a region, we must work together to secure not to be behind even more, but also to search for long-lasting development assistance from the EU.

A month ago, the European Commission presented an important investment package worth 3.2 billion euros to support 21 projects in infrastructure connections, digital technology, climate issues, and energy in the Western Balkans. I am worried about implementing these projects in a situation in which the EU has started to redefine its priorities and rules in its accession policy and allocation of the funds for development. Hopefully, the EU won't give up on the Western Balkans; even it led to a politics described as "We don't give up on the Balkans, but we still don't want it."

I am worried about the fact that the EU expects the powers outside Europe to maintain peace in Europe. The EU has the responsibility to work on a quick political agreement to maintain the peace in Ukraine, because the war only left a heritage of economic paralysis and helplessness. Nowadays, the question of Europe's future depends on the EU's ability to initiate policies of the imposition of peace, along with the UN.



Stability in our region depends on this, which is seen from some analytics as a space in which the war is possibly spilling from Ukraine. I don't believe in such outcomes, but there is a slight danger because of the geopolitical ideas of the Republic of Srpska leaders about the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

History has shown us hundreds of times that wars don't have a winner, and peace doesn't have a loser, which is why I believe that all of you present here share my message that we have to strengthen those powers that are championing peace.

Thank you for your attention.

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Intervention of H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, President of Kosovo (2006 - 2010),

02 April 2022



The Necessity of Peace and Security in the Western Balkans in the Light of Current Events

Respected participants,

"I am sure I will die soon. It is a matter of a few days. In this city, everyone is constantly waiting for death. I just want it not to be too scary" - this quote I just read, is a note of this time, namely March 21, 2022, by a woman from Mariupol, who is a photojournalist.

As we stand here today and discuss many topics that are in the service of and in the interest of global peace, I am convinced that the conscience of each of us is deeply moved by such a message. This message must awaken everyone, each of us, so that such messages are not repeated, so that such stories are not repeated.

None of us would want to hear those words today. However, already this is a reality as painful as it is terrifying. It's a reality that demands an answer, which primarily should be a reflection

of our own human conscience.

Inside ourselves emotions are very intensive in the face of the external and painful developments that a people is facing.

With or without intent, such events affect each of us, affect our present and our future. The impact of what is happening in Ukraine is inevitably being felt in every country, in every family and in every individual.

Today, we are facing a reality which, not only we are observing, but we must also recognize, that is, we're in front of a New World Order, which nowadays has no alternative left.

This does not mean that we are at the End of History. Yet, we are at the Beginning of a New History, which must be resolutely oriented in the right way, that is just, that is serving peace, serving stability, serving the common good.

Or, on the contrary, we will see the beginning of another, also new, history, which will revive the efforts for new tensions, crises and invasions, and not only will it threaten peace, but it will also undo it.

Today, when I see the images coming from Ukraine, with or without being aware I return to what happened 24 years ago in my country.

The killings and expatriations of innocent civilians, women, the elderly, and children, are almost the same images that are being repeated 24 years later, now in another country, and by another invader, but with the same mentality and almost identical strategies.

They are, with full awareness, hitting urban and rural centers exactly where the civilians reside. They're bombing schools and subways, while being aware that it is in these places that the civilian population is being hit. They are also hitting business, small and big, to threaten the existence of the population.

The exodus of 3 to 5 million Ukrainians is another attempt of the general threat to all those innocent residents living in fear and intimidation. The irony of Russia's behavior is that it is forcing hundreds of thousands of refugees to leave their homes and settle in Russian territory, which in parallel reminds us of the displacement of millions of people of the then USSR from their homes, in order to force them to lose their identity.

Despite all this violence, the resistance of all those who are defending their doorstep, who are morally motivated by the strong patriotic resistance of the President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is more than encouraging. But, in order to keep this spirit, to maintain this resistance and, above all, to save the lives of all those people there, it is necessary to take actual steps that would serve peace and stability, well-being and the future, and thus the opposite of this would become impossible.

Respected participants,

Today, this conference is being held in special circumstances. This particularity also imposes on everyone to reflect and give an answer to such a situation.

I consider that the Universal Peace Federation and important personalities within it, strategic partners in different countries, leaders of religious faiths have the duty to intensify their activity in every possible segment to overcome this situation by creating opportunities for real talks and without prejudice.

For none of our countries is Ukraine far away. The ending of the bloody war there parallelly means the ending of the planned killings of its people, along with the destruction of its potential and, at the same time, the affront to the hopes of all peoples around the globe, who today are justly more than concerned by what is happening in Ukraine.

I cannot fail to mention here another fact, which is extremely important. This is the internal rejection that has started in Russia. We see well-known figures from political, cultural and academic life who, aware of the dire consequences that this reality is producing, and having reflected on them, oppose such a war, oppose such a policy, which cannot be justified in the name of anyone or anything.

The inner consciousness of these public leaders underpins further the external efforts required to provide a solution to this issue.

Naturally, this also comes as a result of the multitude of sanctions that have been undertaken by various countries against Russia.

All of us are witnesses today that this whole situation has disrupted the old order, thus building a new order.

However, humanity today does not need to see either imposed solutions, or final solutions. A comprehensive occasion must be created, where all options are available, given that each solution starts and ends at the negotiating table, and that negotiations are the ones that produce the real solution.

Dear participants,

Ladies and gentleman,

This situation does not start and end only in Ukraine. Its scope has the potential to affect many other countries as well. However, I will make a stop here in the Balkans, where the influence and danger from Russia is evident.

We are witnessing many developments in the very spaces of the former Soviet Union in which Russia for many years now, feeling "nostalgia for the former glory", is constantly striving to humiliate, suppress and violate their sovereignty by brutally interfering them within, as now in Ukraine, and in Georgia before. It has also sought the conversion of some other countries around it into its satellites, as well as threatening others who, with dignity, are keeping their sovereignty.

Russia is fomenting these efforts at destabilization, through Serbia, its ally in the Western Balkans, by not recognizing the realities formed by the will of the citizens of the respective countries, in order to remain according to it "potential hotbeds" to promote instability from within. It did so through Serbian nationalist forces, unfortunately also through the Serbian Orthodox Church, which still look for instability and bloodshed. In this regard, remember the ongoing tensions in Bosnia, the attempt to intervene in Montenegro and the various scenarios for the destabilization of Kosovo.

Today is late compared to yesterday, but tomorrow will be much later than today, so it is important that such spaces are closed once and for all, and in addition to being more careful, we should pay more attention to these problems, so as not to leave room for a new reality, which could bring back the wars in the Balkans.

Our countries deserve to be treated with more dignity, and with the same dignity to be accepted in the European family, so that we are not only importers of peace, but also its exporters.

Geographically we belong to Europe, but we must be part of it politically. We have NATO in Kosovo, but we must also have Kosovo in NATO. Because, only in this way, can we manage to close the roads that will otherwise be used by those who do not want order, do not want peace, do not want stability.

None of us should fear countries that are fully put in the service of Peace. Together with them, creating space and perspective for them, we should make sure that destabilizing efforts have no future.

Such influence is by no means smaller in Bosnia. Moreover, the circumstances should be clearly read, that neither Kosovo, nor Bosnia, and no other country should be seen as a way out to this situation that has been forged.

But, in order not to consider these as such, a new momentum must be created at the international level, which would

serve to bring an end to the open topics and protracted dialogue resulting from the careful treatment given to those who don't care, to those who through threats keep old ideas and friendships alive.

Therefore, besides finding it reasonable, I consider it a necessity that NATO, the Council of Europe and international organizations should open their doors to Kosovo immediately, because in this way peace and stability in the Balkans would be facilitated.

Dear friends,

We can talk for long about this, since the lessons as well as the sufferings from such situations are numerous. However, it is not time for words. It is the ending time for the beginning of a new one, of a new order, which first and foremost, would have peace as its mission.

A new order, which would include all the countries that are in service of Peace, and all the peoples who have become its servants.

At the same time, this is the best and fairest answer to those countries that want to create the new order according to them, lining up side by side and uniting in a mission, which does not desire Peace at all.

Finally, I tell you one thing. Future generations will judge all those who will Peace as a fragile legacy. However, in the face of this, one should seize the chance to be thankful, if there are those left with the memory of the threats of the past!

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Intervention of H.E. Mladen Ivanic at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Mladen Ivanic, President of Bosnia Herzegovina (2015-2017)

📅 02 April 2022



There are two groups of reasons in the Western Balkans that affect its stability, security and economic development. One group is related to global geostrategic relations, and the other is the internal relations within the Western Balkans as a region, but also within each of the countries.

The global reasons are the deep division between America, Russia and China, which has become especially pronounced since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, because the world is divided into America and its allies, Russia and its allies, as well as China and its allies. This global conflict also has consequences in the Balkans, as there are countries such as Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania that are extremely critical of Russia and support the United States and NATO. On the other hand, there are countries such as Serbia that are trying to take a neutral position, and within BiH there is no agreement on any position.

Of course, this deepens the divisions within the region.

The second group consists of reasons within the region. The most important is the bad relationship between Croatia and Serbia, for which there is no objective reason 27 years after the war. There are also attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina that Serbia and Croatia interfere too much in their internal affairs. In addition, within Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, there is a huge conflict between Croats and Bosniaks over the Election Law.

In addition, there are conflicts over the nature of the state system, especially between the Serbs and Bosniaks. The Bosniaks are trying to establish a centralized government, and the Serbs are being given the maximum possible degree of autonomy for the Republika Srpska. And for all these reasons, Bosnia and Herzegovina is in a permanent crisis. It seems that Montenegro is also in a state of crisis, because it does not have a stable government. Add to that the still open issue of Kosovo, and the tensions within Northern Macedonia and the situation in the region can be considered very unstable. The only possible solution, which however does not seem realistic at the moment, would be to speed up the process of joining the European Union. This, however, requires a much clearer European Union policy, which it does not currently have. In the context of what is happening in Ukraine, the EU may finally take a clearer stance and speed up the process accession for the Western Balkans nations. This would be the only way to ensure not only peace and stability, but also the necessary preconditions for the region's much-needed rapid economic development.



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Intervention of Hon. Talat Xhaferi at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Hon. Talat Xhaferi, President of the National Assembly of North Macedonia



📅 02 April 2022

Dear former and current senior political representatives from the Western Balkans region and beyond,

Dear Vice-President of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania, Ms. Vasilika Hysi,

Dear members of the Universal Peace Federation,

Dear Members of the Podgorica Club,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special pleasure for me today to be among you again and to have the opportunity to greet the participants of the Balkan Leadership Conference and the Podgorica Club on behalf of the MPs of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia and on my own behalf, which this time focuses on the topic "Peace, security and economic development in the Western Balkans".

The commitment and seriousness with which the countries that are part of this region approach the Western Balkans clearly shows that we are aware of the challenges we have faced and still continue to face day by day, and that the only way to be

successful in this battle for the survival and progress of the region is the regional inclusive cooperation with commitment to the main European values of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights, but also the importance that reconciliation has for the success of these transformation processes of the region.

Inclusive regional cooperation is a fundamental factor for our partners and for us as countries on our path to membership in the European Union and the future of the whole region is exactly in it. Therefore, on this occasion, I will reiterate the call I made a few days ago at the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, in Brdo, Slovenia, that it is time for the vision of the future of Europe to be turned into action, the enlargement process to gain momentum while membership negotiations to become a reality. The enlargement of the European family with the Western Balkan countries represents a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability, especially now, in this war situation in Ukraine, which clearly demonstrates how quickly peace and stability in the region can change and increase the challenges of security, economy, energy and other challenges in the continent.

The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, on March 3, adopted the Declaration which strongly condemns Russia's aggression against Ukraine as contrary to the international law and as a state we fully harmonized our policies with the stands of the European Union foreign and security policies in the context of sanctions against Russia. Of course, given the fact that as countries we are positioned in a turbulent region and we have witnessed many conflicts, we deeply sympathize with the citizens of Ukraine, we express our condolences for the lost lives and we call for a rapid diplomatic solution and termination of military operations, with the vocabulary of hatred to be replaced with the contemporary vocabulary of civilized dialogue.

Dear friends,

This Conference proves that we as a region continue to build bridges of cooperation and rapprochement between our nations, our countries and the whole region with the European Union, because thus we create ample space for the development and advancement of this part of the continent by coordinating joint projects initiated under the Berlin Process and Union policies, with a specific focus on the Economic and Investment Plan, the Green Agenda and the Common Regional Market. This provides the right impetus for building the best economies and structural change of the Western Balkans toward a green transformation and will prepare us for economic integration in the Single Market,



especially in this post-Covid-19 period. This regional cooperation is a proof of the comprehensive potential and will accelerate the economic modernization and thus facilitate the rapprochement of our region with the socio-economic principles and standards of the Union.

In this context, I must mention the achievements, such as the Green Lanes in ensuring the circulation of basic health and nutritional products during the pandemic, which were an excellent example of how rapid and effective response to disasters can be facilitated, and that the pandemic crisis provided opportunities for closer regional cooperation and further deepening of the economic cooperation with the European Union. In this case, the solidarity of the European Union in the fight against the pandemic, the support in the form of vaccines through the EU Mechanism, only confirms this necessity. The connection to a sustainable transport as an important cornerstone of economic and social integration, the full implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement with free regime with an attempt to further reduce costs, but also the commitment to the adoption of the Agreement on the free movement of people with IDs are also valuable.

At the Berlin Summit, we as the Republic of North Macedonia proposed the establishment of a regional program for the rapprochement of young diplomats, and not only diplomats, but also young people in general. Why? Because we believe in the importance that young people have for the future of the Western Balkans as the main power for the promotion of European integration and, therefore, this group should be more involved in the European processes and we as political factors should take concrete measures for the development of the region as a place of opportunities for young people to stay and contribute in the region. The role of young people as the main engine of good neighbourly relations, cooperation, reconciliation and peace building that will further contribute to the development context should not be left without support of the civil society, governments and parliaments. It is our duty to sign and adopt the respective agreements and decisions for the benefit of our citizens.

Distinguished guests,

The Republic of North Macedonia has worked and continues to work towards achieving the strategic determinations since its independence in 1991, namely, full membership in the EU and NATO. On March 27, we marked the second anniversary of our membership in NATO and the satisfaction is understandable, which cannot be said about the membership in the European Union where the situation is different from what we want and this is seriously reflected in the citizens' confidence in the European future. In fact, trust at the moment is at the lowest possible level, there is disappointment and disbelief that this process will ever end successfully. However, given the current developments, we consider that the European Union should urgently set a date for holding the first Intergovernmental Conference for the start of negotiations, while the open issues with Bulgaria should be resolved in the format that is currently taking place.

Dear colleagues,

I wish we have a fruitful exchange of opinions and thank you for the attention!

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Intervention of H.E. Vilson Ahmeti at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Vilson Ahmeti, Prime Minister of Albania (1991-1992)

02 April 2022



Dear participants.

The holding of this meeting in Tirana has special importance. The troubling situations that Europe and the world are going through today, especially in this period of armed conflict in Ukraine, dictate more effective reflection and cooperation in our region. In this point of time, our countries in the Balkans must be more attentive to solving the difficulties caused by this general crisis.

The economic difficulties of our countries brought about by the rising prices of many goods, especially fuel, gas and electricity, call for fast and efficient analyses and measures.

Every country in our region faces a lot of economic and geostrategic problems.

Today, the economic cooperation of the Balkan countries takes on a special importance.

This cooperation must be very efficient, especially in the trade of goods and products that these countries produce and trade between them.

Surely, we have economic cooperation agreements among ourselves, but now it is required that these agreements be as practical as possible and provide quick and efficient solutions.

I think that from this point of view they should be reviewed to maximize their productivity.

The basic food products that our region possesses need to be distributed among our countries at best possible. And if this is the case, both their quantity and price should be taken into account.

I think our countries and relevant governments, should open and expand the areas of cooperation and that of each other's private business to facilitate and stimulate the interest of our private companies to ensure the transaction of products; especially their transport. In the area of cross-border cooperation between our countries, the engagement of government bodies to facilitate the differentiation of taxes for the movement of products can be of special importance and have a positive effect.

In the midst of the European energy crisis, the cooperation of the Balkan countries is of special importance. As countries which use water resources in generating electricity, we can cooperate in exploiting them as efficiently as possible. I want to bring to your attention one case of this cooperation.

It is known that Lake Ohrid is a major source of water power in the region. Through the Drini River, it supplies an energy water cascade to Northern Macedonia and Albania. If this energy source could be used more efficiently, it would create additional energy for power generation.

Joint studies and cooperation between our two countries, for the acceptable and efficient regulation of the water level in Lake Ohrid, would create a greater hydropower potential. We have an agreement between our countries – the one inherited from the former Yugoslavia, that defines the maximum and minimum water level of Lake Ohrid.

In the condition of the energy crisis and its resultant high prices, there is room to review this agreement, for a period of time, to enable an increase of Drin River inflows. This requires the level of Lake Ohrid to be reduced to the minimum possible technical levels.



Certainly, an agreement between the two countries on the level of experts is needed for a lower level (the minimum permitted) of Lake Ohrid.

Of course, this requires a joint study by both parties and agreement on mutual interests. For example, the hydropower gained (increased amount of water from Lake Ohrid) can be compensated for with the power supply.

Increased inflows of Drin River would enable additional electricity generation capacity to the respective hydropower plants.

A joint bilateral analysis and action would be useful and beneficial to both.

To reduce as much as possible the consequences of the food crisis that may knock on our doors tomorrow, I think that cross-border cooperation to facilitate the exchange of goods and fresh and processed food products, would have a positive effect.

Facilitating the movement of these products in these areas would enable an increase of supply, with more products for these regions. There are many agricultural and livestock products that would stimulate food production in these areas through a more open market.

Today, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline passes through the Balkans, transporting gas to Italy and beyond. Since its design, this pipeline has no outlet for the supply of the Balkan countries, where it flows. I think the time has come for this gas to be used by these countries as well. In this case, a joint study between these countries at the technical level to designate the minimum needs and the future needs for gas of each country is of primary importance. After a full technical investigation, it can be negotiated with the TAP managers to get a certain quantity of gas for the Balkan countries. This of course requires a comprehensive study and argumentation to the TAP authorities.

I think that the cooperation between the Balkan countries should take a higher technical, scientific, economic and strategic level, not only on the level of facilitating the movement of goods and people, but also cooperation in the field of production and service capacities, as in the case of joint ventures of production, services and utilization of natural resources capacities. The actualization of such agreements between the Balkan countries will be a positive achievement and action.

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Intervention of H.E. Vincenzo Del Monaco at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Vincenzo Del Monaco, Head of the Presence of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Albania

📅 02 April 2022

I am delighted to contribute to this dialogue and I find it meaningful that the OSCE is associated with this event, with a regional width. It clearly speaks for the role of the OSCE, as we all know that this region needs to continue counting on partners that come with a strong and credible democratic agenda.

I full recognize the title of this panel, as economic development is indeed “a sustainable precondition for reconciliation”, the other one being Rule of Law. On top of all the “preconditions” I would position political will and the presence here today of distinguished leaders is a valuable resource from which to draw inputs on how to foster regional cooperation and discuss security.

Now, building security based on sustainable economic development is part of the functional approach that successfully brought together six countries in Europe in the Fifties. They testified to a concrete will of sharing sovereignty, which is much more than renouncing to national competencies.

The idea of regional economic cooperation is fundamentally a two-way commitment.

Firstly, a responsibility on political leaders to reinstating and enhancing this vision of a more integrated economic area, and translating it into programmatic activities: from the fountain pen of top leaders to the files of the customs services. From high politics to regulatory frameworks and mutual recognition of legal provisions. It is a step and at the same time a journey consistent with the fulfilment of the strategic objectives of countries of this region.

And I am blessed to be serving here in Albania, which so much contributes to the development and to the security of this region, as to the OSCE.

Secondly, a more bottom-up approach that places importance on civil society, that zooms on universities, on individuals to embrace the same vision of openness and contribute to creating what we call an “enabling environment” for regional prosperity. This entails an effort of creativity. For instance, it has to do with curricula of universities and the higher education networks. It has to do with trust. Trust of young people in the potential of this region, in their institutions, and in the fact that their voice is heard.

Let’s be honest. Because of this horrible war in the heart of Europe, the overall international context does not seem to promise much good news for the months to come. Isn’t this a stronger call on leaders to strengthen cooperation at all levels, to try to compensate for the difficulties faced by the economic realm? I am thinking of challenges that bring together a number of countries, not only in South-East Europe, and that put to test the resilience of people: spiking prices, drop in the purchasing power of people, impact on energy supplies, slowing of foreign and national investments.

If we broaden the zoom, which the OSCE does actually very well, we understand that stopping the corrosion of globalization was already difficult, and the war in Ukraine might make it even harder. A very interesting analyses recently published by Foreign Affairs on the future of globalization points out that leaders and policy makers can start shaping a common market among democracies that is as broad and deep as possible. This is a debate for political leaders, for you. I will only say that I strongly believe in the result stemming from opening up borders, connecting people, letting goods, services and workers move freely from one country to another in this region. I see the potential



of this area with a same level playing field for economic actors that fosters healthy competition and minimizes the many downsides of closed border economies. Yes, it is not a law hanging fruit, but it is within reach.

And let me tell you that in this spirit today's exercise promoted by the Podgorica Club and the International Summit Council for Peace – Balkans is more relevant and timely than ever.

Now, a question you might ask is why is the OSCE present here, in this Conference?

Because economic development is one of the components of our unique and inclusive understanding of security built on cooperation and rule of law. Our work here in the field is fully resonant to the Polish Chair's priorities in the economic and environmental dimension, namely the recovery and modernization of economies, with a focus on how to build more resilient space ready for future challenges.

As our economies continue to struggle with the aftermath of the pandemic, which requires co-ordinated and targeted actions to mitigate the economic and social hindrances, we are in the midst of a political pandemic triggered by the war at the heart of Europe.

Also achieving climate neutrality and reduction of their environmental footprint remains a great challenge for all OSCE countries, with direct implications for our sustainable development, our security.

I would briefly highlight concrete examples of what we do here in the field of economic cooperation: we support Albania to fight against corruption, to develop transparent public procurement mechanisms, to promote economic development while upholding environmental security. And in the course of our work, we work both at national and local level, we try to inject a regional dimension as part of our contribution to security.

I very much prioritise our "whole-of-society" approach in fostering economic cooperation and security. Under the guidance of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities for the entire OSCE area, Amb. Igli Hasani, on 28 February we kick-started the project called Young Developers and Entrepreneurs to Advance Start-ups (YDEAS) here in Tirana. A major initiative conducted in close partnership with the Mayor, Erjon Veliaj.

The event benefited from high participation, being attended by more than 40 start-ups initiated by youth, by more than 100 youth participants, more than 10 local administration decision makers from the whole region. With this event, we paired the innovation and energetic young entrepreneurs with local decision-makers, as our very own contribution to reducing socio-economic disparities as root causes of instability and conflict.

It is precisely because of our comprehensive approach to security that we supported this project on youth entrepreneurship in the digital and social economy. As part of the social economy diverse domain, social entrepreneurship offers an opportunity to re-envision a society based on sustainable environmental development, social capital, and inclusion. This society is more inclusive, creative, and sustainable than ever before and its innovative solutions to the many conundrums of our era are conducive to a better quality of life and wellbeing of individuals, communities and places.

Let me conclude by saying that this year we celebrate the 25th of OSCE Presence in this very hospitable country. Since 1997, the Presence has continued to evolve in step with Albania and the Region. So much has changed since then, but what has not and will not change is our dedication and commitment to keep being a key partner of Albania on its reform path.

Thank you for your attention.

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Intervention of Mrs. Manjola Vasmatics at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Mrs. Manjola Vasmatics, president of the Family Federation for World Peace (FFWPU) in Albania

02 April 2022



Distinguished leaders, guests, ladies and gentleman, brothers and sisters,

It is a great privilege and honor to be here today. Doing the right thing at the right time has positively affected peacebuilding and gave the right direction in history. After listening to the first session, I must say, this conference is happening at an extraordinary time. The topic is really relevant and all inclusive. Peace is a right that every human being, every nation and the world must experience and have, but at times of war peace seems to be a luxury. We feel the pain of the people involved in war and acknowledge that the whole world is affected in all aspects of life.

However, another very destructive issue is also happening, which is threatening the present and the future of our country of Albania, as well as South-East Europe. As young people, we are losing our peers in a different way, something is swallowing our youth. I think the biggest threat to all of the western Balkans, an alarm for the future of these countries, is the Youth

deserting the Balkan countries. The people with whom I grew up are not anymore around me. Two of my best friends are living in Germany, one of them as an established scientist, and I must say much treasured by Germany, and my classmates are living all around the world. My sister received a full scholarship from Cambridge University and after finishing hers studies she is now living and working in London.

It is sad to see that the brightest students, young talented people leave the country. This, clearly shows that the future of the country is fading day by day. The main reasons behind this, all of us know, are economic, the sky-high unemployment and young people who believe they won't be treated fairly and have a bright future here. Nobody is immune to this phenomenon, which affects even the highest families in the land.

The most frequent question my husband and I get asked, now for more than a decade, is: Why do you live in Albania? Many people get surprised and blown away that I didn't grab the opportunity to leave Albania, because being married to an EU citizen, I have that possibility.

Just to clarify this, I'm not against people moving, gaining experience, becoming global citizens, and contributing on the world stage, but this is not what we are seeing.

And I also know many people who choose to stay and commit to developing the country, and I thank them for doing that.

Despite reading the news and the statistics, I did not experience much this grim reality until the last two years when we were building this Peace Embassy, where I was shocked to find out that the contractors of the building company had difficulties because of the lack of specialists and workers. It is not hard to imagine where the nation's economic prospects are headed.

But leaving the country is not their deepest heart and desire, ...

Albanians who love to be near their relatives, to frequently spend time together, are obliged to leaving their families behind. With tears in their eyes and with hope in their hearts, they spend their last savings – and often more than that – in order that they can travel to a faraway country, sometimes risking their freedom or even their lives doing so. Do all of them succeed finally? And those who do succeed, are they truly happy with their new life, far from where

their heart truly resides? I strongly doubt it. Sometimes they hide the pain in their heart, and only show the economic progress they made. But is there a better solution? Solution there is, but there is no quick fix. Without sacrifice there can't be real and sustainable development.

We need a principled economy with moral values and integrity guiding us. And we need that urgently, as greed is destroying all the human family, it is causing economic inequality, where the gap between rich and poor is getting bigger and bigger, day by day. We are living in a society where the top 1 percent of people hold about half of the world's wealth and resources.

And the question is not how those people gained their wealth. But to fix the problem, the most important questions must be how they use it; whether it is for a greater purpose or just for themselves.

The founders of UPF, Father and Mother Moon, showed that the key is in the most important principle: that of living for the sake of others. They went on to explain that all economic activity should resemble the circulation of blood in the human body which has the task of transporting important nutrients and oxygen to every organ and every cell, in order to be healthy. If a certain organ starts to keep more and more for itself, is it considered a successful and rich organ? No, it is sick and needs to be cured!

Father and Mother Moon, undertook many projects and personal initiatives, believing that the purpose of business is not simply to make money. It is also to support the precious work of building peace. Even though they started from very humble beginnings, their contribution went on beyond nations. One example is the Peace Embassy, a fortress built to serve Peace in the Balkans.

Dear fellow participants, I am not an economic expert, but I hope we can all make a contribution, and help together to realize the equalization of technology, the economy and political culture, in order for Peace to be real in our nations and society. Thank you!

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Intervention of Dr. Michael Balcomb at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Dr. Michael Balcomb, FFWPU President for Europe and the Middle East

02 April 2022



Good morning everybody! Thank you to all my fellow panelists.

Welcome again to this beautiful Peace Embassy! This is a gift to all the peoples of the Albania and the region, blessed by our UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

In her memoir, *Mother of Peace*, Mother Moon speaks highly of Albania and of her experiences here and her meetings with Pres. Moisiu, of whom she is particularly fond. She writes that the energy and optimism of Albanians, especially young Albanians, reminds her of the best qualities of her native Korea. She has a hope that Albania and all of the Balkan nations will rise together and be a bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. That of course will take a lot of hard work, even more so when we have conflict raging not so far away.

I am not just talking about physical hard work, but spiritual and mental effort as well. Our topic this morning is the role of economic development and progress, but for any lasting personal or national prosperity there first needs to be a strong moral foundation. I think it's a big mistake of modern societies

to think that the life of the spirit and of morality are separate from economics and such real world issues as prosperity, security and cooperation. In fact, they are very closely connected.

All human beings have a natural desire to improve our circumstances for ourselves our family and our nation. This is a God-given characteristic; yet today it is often misused and corrupted by self centeredness. We are learning new terms such as "Oligarch" and "the megarich" to describe those who have put wealth above all else.

I would like to take a moment to reflect about two great peace initiatives of our founder the late Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Although he was a deeply spiritual man with a profound faith in God, he often proposed economic projects as a way to build bridges of peace with those who might otherwise have been considered enemies.

For example when he and Mother Moon went to North Korea in 1991 to meet with the then President Kim Il Sung, determined to go there in the spirit of meeting his elder brother rather than to confront the enemy that in reality Kim really was. After all it was Kim and his regime who had overseen the imprisonment and torture of Father Moon in North Korean death camp at the start of the Korean War. Decades later, Kim even sent assassins to the United States in an attempt to eliminate father Moon.

When Father and Mother Moon arrived in Pyongyang, they worked hard to find common ground with this man who they could've treated as an enemy. And what they agreed upon was not politics, philosophy or religious doctrine but rather practical ways to help the North Korean people to better themselves.

Even though Kim died just a few years later, Father and Mother Moon kept their word by investing in Pyeonghwa motors, then the only car company in North Korea. They built a hotel and a conference center for foreign visitors in Pyongyang even though they knew that both enterprises never make a profit. And they continued to advocate on the world stage. for the peaceful unification of Korea.

This remains a priority to this day. Just six weeks ago UPF hosted an outstanding summit in Korea, co hosted by Mother Moon, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and Sam Dech Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia. The leaders of many nations were due to come, but because of COVID sent video messages instead. I would like to thank in particular the contributions from Albania and Kosovo.

When Reverend Moon founded the Universal Peace Federation in 2005, he gave a speech in New York that he then repeated night after night in cities all around the world, visiting more than 100 nations in little over 100 days.

In that speech he spoke about his vision of a world that would be united as one human family under God. But how to accomplish that? He did not speak about the need for more, more prayers, or more education, or even more conferences.

Instead he proposed a bold engineering project to connect the entire world through an international that would bring together the former enemy nations of Japan and Korea through a tunnel under the sea of Japan. It would pass through North Korea and Russia and China before crossing the Bering Strait into the United States.

One night he was challenged that the cost of the Bering tunnel alone might run to several hundred billion dollars an almost inconceivable sum. "Yes, I know" he said "But the cost of war would be much, much greater."

One common theme at the February summit was the problem of creating an equalization of living standard opportunity for the citizens of Korea north and south. North Korea is one of the worlds poorest countries; South Korea is one of the richest.

Several speakers mentioned the fact that many people in South Korea, and especially the young people, seem to be unwilling to make the financial sacrifices that would be necessary to raise the impoverished north to an equal standard of living.

Commenting on this, Mother Moon said such thinking was short sighted and self defeating. Not making the effort, the sacrifice, would in the end cost so much more. And she went on to say that this is the great challenge facing all our societies in the 21st-century. The real conflict is not on the battlefield but in the hearts and minds of men and women.

This is just as true here in Europe as it is in Asia.

Mother Moon has said that Atlantic civilization —European and western civilization, has lost its way. Although it had started based on the Christian tradition and the best of western philosophy, we have become a society that took from others rather than giving to others.

She tells us that the only hope for peace in the 21st-century is to create a society and world that focused not taking, but on giving. If this sounds like simple idealism, we should consider that selfishness always leads to ruin, whether this is selfishness in the family in society or even in nations.

However, Mother Moon said that even if the nations of the world could somehow take on this challenge of living selflessly it would not be enough and it might not last. We need one thing more, and that is to see each other as brothers and sisters under the same heavenly parent. Like any parent God wants all of his children to enjoy the same opportunity, the same blessings. He does not show favoritism, in the words of the scripture making the sun rise on the good and the bad and the rain fall on the just and the unjust.

What this means is that we must really take care of each other. Words and even prayers are not enough. We need action.

One example that is very much in my mind today is that of our UPF and Family Federation response to the conflict in Ukraine. Let be honest and say that there are many people among our members and even ambassadors for peace who feel that UPF should be speaking out more loudly against aggression and war, that we should be taking sides.

But we have chosen not to waste our energy on words that will likely not have any real effect. Instead we have chosen to directly help as many of the people of Ukraine as we can. We have raised over \$300,000 in donations and we are using this money to assist a number of refugee families known directly to the UPF community. Currently we are supporting about 60 adults and 80 children who are now refugees in nine countries and 16 locations.

In addition, our wonderful volunteers including many ambassadors for peace have provided food clothing medicine and toys to more than 7000 refugees through our peace embassies in Warsaw, Poland and Chisinau, Moldova. I'm not saying that these efforts are particularly exceptional, but they do show our desire to make a concrete difference rather than satisfy ourselves only with statements and words.

Once again I congratulate and thank the members of the Podgorica club and UPF Balkans, and I thank this distinguished panel for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you today. Let us determine together to see people who act and not just speak. Thank you.

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Intervention of Mr. Bogdan Pammer at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Mr. Bogdan Pammer, European president of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP)

📅 02 April 2022



Empowering youth and students to lead societal transformation in the Western Balkans

It is a common belief that the state of the youth determines the future of the state. This is particularly true for the Western Balkan region. A guiding concern and passion that brings us together here is the empowerment of young people to be a positive force that leads societal transformation in the Western Balkans.

With the war in the Ukraine also present, we need to ask ourselves how we can ensure that young people take an active role in strengthening our democratic institutions and safeguarding peace on all levels.

The defenses of peace must be built in our schools and universities, public spaces and square, on social media, in bars and cultural centres, in churches, mosques and synagogues, wherever young people meet:

- engage with each other
- share their hopes and dreams,
- express their fears,
- exchange their opinions
- make plans for their own future.

So, how do we ensure that youth and students can play a leading role in positive change in the Western Balkans?

I would like us to approach this question in three steps:

First, **positive societal change or transformation** needs to be sketched out. *What sort of societies do we want to work towards? And what are the key challenges our societies face, globally?*

Next, we will focus on the **state of the youth** in Europe and the Balkans. *What is it like to be young in Europe and the Balkans today?*

And finally, a **call to action**.

1. Three key areas for societal transformation

At the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace we work to empower youth and students to become peace heroes - these are young people who against all odds make an impact in their community and contribute to realizing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

One of our signature programmes is the PEACE DESIGNER TRAINING. This is a course in which young people uncover the social issues they are passionate about, learn to empathize with a target group, analyze a situation and plan and manage a project.

Working across Europe, we experience that the concerns of youth are fundamentally human concerns.

In my understanding the "youth" is (paradoxically) the oldest part of us. The inner child that lives within us is much older than the "adult" version of ourselves. And I do believe that there is profound wisdom in the opinions,



expressions and concerns of young people. No organization or country for that matter can do without the sometimes raw and unpolished energy that comes from young people.

Three Great Divides

Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer at MIT, did extensive research on organizational and societal change and transformation processes. He suggests that there are “three systemic disconnects” that challenge our societies globally.

1. The Ecological Divide, the disconnect between self and nature
2. The Social Divide: Disconnect between self and other
3. Personal (or spiritual) Divide: Disconnect between self and self

This sort of analysis strikes a chord with the young people I work with. Once they engage with issues, most 14-18 year olds are not interested in quick fixes, but seek deeper transformation.

The following issues regularly come up in our discussion: (refer to slide)

Three levels of peace

Each of these disconnects is one area in which we are called to create peace.

And each of these areas corresponds to a fundamental need that young people share and youth policy needs to address.

Three levels of peace	Personal	Social	Ecological
Needs of young people	Sense of purpose & Self-efficacy	Belonging	Opportunities to develop skills and leave a mark
Policy areas	Healthy and active lifestyle	Civic engagement and political participation	Economic participation and opportunities

2. State of the Youth in Europe and the Balkans

These three areas need to be addressed comprehensively, if we are serious about empowering youth and the future of the Balkans.

1. Promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among youth
2. Fostering youth’s civic engagement and political participation
3. Increasing opportunities and the economic participation of young people

The region of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, The Republic of North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia) is younger than the EU. This is a significant demographic advantage that the Western Balkans have over other parts of Europe.

Unfortunately, there is a serious problem with regards to the availability of demographic and other key data in Western Balkan countries.

Healthy and active lifestyle among youth

UNICEF identifies alcohol, tobacco and insufficient physical activity as risk factors for adolescent health. The 11-to-17-year-olds in the Western Balkans score better than the European average with all three risk factors.

Globally the conversation about adolescent health is moving away from mentioned risk factors to issues of mental health. As almost everywhere we do not know enough about the state of our youth’s mental health.

The physical and mental health of a countries’ youth population are an important indicator for what to expect from the future of a country. An unhealthy and inactive youth population implies considerable human, social and economic strain and costs. The economic costs of bad mental health amounted in 2017 to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) of the 36 OECD members.

It is undisputed that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures such as lockdowns and school closings had further detrimental effects on the mental health of youth and students.

An Austrian study in October and November 2021 brought the following results:

The frequency of depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms but also sleep disorders have increased five to tenfold in comparison to before the pandemic. Around 20% of the girls and 14% of the boys suffer from recurrent suicidal thoughts, i.e. they think about suicide more than half of the days.

In 2018, the WHO found that in Europe:

- Half of all mental health problems in adulthood have their onset during or before adolescence.

- Depression and anxiety disorders are among the top five causes of the overall disease burden

The minds and lives of young people conflict zones, with real victims at a real cost. Building and strengthening peace on the personal level, especially among our youth is a key responsibility of us all.

Civic Engagement and Political Participation

Youth political disengagement continues to be a major issue facing contemporary democracies that needs to be better understood. Participation in political activities is in crisis, especially when it comes to young people, and this is a major issue facing contemporary democracies.

There is reason for concern. One report from 2017 titled "Young people in Montenegro – social ornament or social capital?" concludes in a tone of resignation:

Though they hope for a better tomorrow, a very small number of them is actually willing to make the effort - either through social engagement, or through youth activism, volunteering or similar activities - to contribute to changes for the better. (...) they spend 4.2 hours a day on average on the Internet. The majority of them (...) for passive use of their leisure time in the virtual space.

Generation Y seems to have lower levels of political engagement when it comes to participating in traditional forms of politics such as voting and being a member of a political party, compared to older generations. Only 46% of young people in the EU have voted in the last local, national or European election.

Yet there are also recent studies that argue that young people are not apathetic and disengaged, and that they have instead turned to alternative forms of political engagement such as protesting, demonstrating, being part of organizations, signing petitions, volunteering, and engaging online.

According to the **Eurobarometer Youth Survey (2021)** – which is based on 18000+ interviews – the political issues youth cares most about are

- tackling poverty and social inequality
- combating climate change and protecting the environment
- and combating unemployment or a lack of jobs

Opportunities and Economic Participation

The Western Balkans are confronted with a serious regional "brain drain", caused by a lack of opportunities for and economic participation of young people.

The primary reason is the lack of investment and economic opportunities in the Balkans. Much of the **foreign direct investment** (FDI) into the Western Balkans is focused on low-cost labor in low-productivity sectors.

About half of Montenegro's young people want to leave the country. The tendency is present throughout the Western Balkans as 47 percent of Bosnians and 45 percent of Montenegrins **live abroad**, followed by 41 percent of Albanians, 30 percent each of Kosovars and Macedonians, and 18 percent of Serbians, according to the World Bank's latest figures. The average for all of the countries in the **European Union**, by comparison, is around **11 percent**.

3. A call to action: Recommendations, actions and priorities in 2022 and beyond

1 - Invest in Education for Scientific and Digital Creativity

Education for scientific and digital creativity is key to ensure co-prosperity in this age. The digital age has the potential to become an equalizer if good policy is implemented. This age, however, is also characterized by climate change and worrying tendencies of big tech companies, which some call "Surveillance Capitalism".

Scientific creativity and digital skills are key to turning these ecological and digital challenges.

It requires young people of both skill and character to ensure that science and technology contribute to mutual prosperity. I see no reason why the Western Balkans could not play a leading role in this area.

2 - Make it easy and hip for young people in the Balkans to travel and meet each other

Funds for youth exchanges, such as the EU's Erasmus+ programme that includes neighboring partnership are important, but not sufficient.

It is a great opportunity not only for Albania, but the whole Western Balkan that Tirana is Youth Capital 2022. It can play a key role in overcoming the COVID19 inertia. Personally, I am really inspired by the plans of the National Youth Congress and the City of Tirana.

Arts, culture, the media and social media have the potential to drive organic exchanges across the Western Balkans. Youth mobility can be revitalized as a key ingredient to tackle negative nationalistic trends.

3 – Invest in Public Spaces for young people

Public spaces are crucial for young people to develop and thrive.

Young people develop by leaving marks in their surroundings. However, it is often the case that young people feel excluded from **public spaces**. The inclusivity of public squares, parks and other public spaces is crucial for the development of citizen consciousness and the democratic involvement of young people. Youth leaders have an important role in making young voices heard and their needs visible.

Places of learning such as schools and libraries are usually designed by adults for students, but seldomly by young students themselves. Young people need well defined bright and warm spaces to learn and grow as persons. Unfortunately, schools often fail to involve young people themselves to co-design, co-develop and co-own these learning environments. Youth leaders can play a key role in demanding and developing frameworks to co-develop places of learning together with educators and authorities.

For this reason, we plan a Youth Peace Seminar in the context of the Tirana Youth Capital 2022. We want to bring together youth leaders from across Europe to explore what can be done to engage and empower young people as co-designers of these spaces.

4 - Foster Education for Character Development and Relationships Education

One's character and personal skills as well as the quality of one's relationships are key to physical and mental health and wellbeing. Families and schools (in this order) have been proven to be the very places where interventions that improve emotional and social skills have the highest impact in preventing harm and improving mental health. This is supported by robust international evidence, including the WHO Report on adolescent mental health.

The nations in the Western Balkans will surely be able to capitalize on its demographic advantages, if they take these findings seriously by

- investing ideationally, culturally and financially in healthy relationships between parents and children, as well as good marriages
- promoting a wholesome approach where education about knowledge and skills stands on the foundation of character development and relationships education

*** The next generation will certainly surprise us**

It is important to improve policies in the youth area, but ultimately the next generation and the future will certainly surprise us. So, as individuals and as institutions we need to listen to the wisdom of the old and young.

I am deeply grateful that I can work with incredibly talented and good-hearted young people. In my heart, I am convinced that the next generation will be better than my own.

With this genuinely optimistic outlook and two quotations that motivate me personally to work for young people across Europe and the Middle East, I would like to conclude my remarks:

"The years of our youth are the best time to dedicate ourselves to exciting goals that make our hearts beat faster... The passion of youth breaks down walls. Young people of true passion have the spirit to challenge themselves and the world around them... Turn passion into purpose and purpose into principles." – Hak Ja Han

"When young people dedicate themselves to sacrifice and service with God's true love, they will find the key to solving world poverty and hunger. They will be able to heal the feelings of animosity and hatred caused by differences between rich and poor and by different historical backgrounds and experiences. Only based on love that loves the unlovable, can we find a clear direction to overcome the intractable conflicts that plague our age." – Sun Myung Moon

Thank you for your kind attention.

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Intervention of Mr. Vladyslav Vakin at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Mr. Vladyslav Vakin, a young Ukrainian man

02 April 2022



Thank you, Mr. Rroshi, for your introduction. I feel honored to speak to this very special audience about what is happening in my native country of Ukraine.

All of us were very shocked when, on the 24th of February, Russian military forces crossed our border and began to attack our cities. Although in history Russia and Ukraine generally have had a close relationship, this action may divide our nations for centuries to come.

I am a believer in the Divine Principle, the spiritual ideal of the Unification Movement, which was founded by Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, and whenever I face some difficulty, I try to understand what would be the best response. In my faith, we have been taught to look at things not only from a human perspective, but to try to understand how God, our Heavenly Parent, looks at the situation.

It has been a very difficult process for me to find answers in this situation. However, two things come to mind, which I believe are very important.

The first is justice. There can be no doubt that the actions of the Russian government toward Ukraine are evil. No matter what explanations are being propagated by the Russian media, there is no way that this assault on Ukraine can be considered as anything but evil. The reaction of the United Nations supports such a view: Only four nations voted to support Russia, and the vast majority opposed the Russian decision or abstained from voting.

Another thought that comes to mind is to look at this situation from the point of view of God, our Heavenly Parent, who considers all humankind to be His children. There are now over 10 million displaced Ukrainians, including more than 3 million women and children who have crossed the border into neighboring countries, leaving behind their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers to defend the nation. This is heartbreaking. And then we have to look at the numbers of deaths. So far it is estimated that thousands have died. This is truly a national catastrophe and an international emergency, and the world must stand with Ukraine against this evil.

How should we feel toward the Russian people? First of all, those who ordered this disastrous action must be held accountable. Secondly, the Russian people need to know what is being done in their name, and then they must stand up and call their leaders to account.

As a follower of Dr. and Mrs. Moon, I look to their example of relating with their enemies, and in this case, how as Koreans, they dealt with the North Korean regime. In 1991 they traveled to Pyongyang to meet Chairman Kim Il Sung and reached out in an effort to find a solution to the divided peninsula. In essence, North Koreans were not the enemies of South Koreans as much as they were victims of a false ideology and an oppressive dictatorship.

It could be said that Russians similarly are victims of false propaganda and also an oppressive dictatorship. The young Russian soldiers who found themselves in the middle of a war in Ukraine were lied to by their own government and their military superiors and had no choice but to fight and kill, or be killed. What a desperate situation. Although these young men have committed grave crimes and many thousands of them have died, we have to feel compassion for their parents and relatives, as we do for the Ukrainian victims of their actions.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope and pray that this conflict soon will come to an end and that we can work on the physical and emotional healing process so that such a war never occurs again on European land or elsewhere.



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Intervention of Ms. Erëza Mehmeti at the April 2022 Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Ms. Erëza Mehmeti, the Coordinator of the International Office at Kosovo's University of Business and Technology (UBT),

02 April 2022



Greetings everyone,

I am honored to speak in front of a precious audience on an important and very significant topic for the future of the Balkans - the youth of the Adriatic generation and beyond.

Since I come from Kosovo, where youth make up more than half of the population, I cannot help but be proud of such wealth. This is because youth is rightly considered the greatest asset of a country. And Kosovo is lucky to have such a youth, which has an extraordinary potential for its development, for its future.

The development of a country is inevitably linked to its youth. In my country, young people from all walks of life are stepping into their communities, raising their voices, and becoming pillars of change. Having a healthy, well-trained, and professionally prepared youth, Kosovo will undoubtedly have a bright future.

Here, an important role is played by education and vocational training, two main areas in which the contribution of the University for Business and Technology, known as UBT, where I have worked for many years, is extremely large. Throughout these years, UBT has made an extraordinary contribution to the creation of a knowledge society by training young people in various fields and getting them ready for the labor market. We achieved this success by organizing extra-curricular activities, establishing hubs, and by linking curriculum teaching with the latest technology and practical work in accordance with the requirements of the industry. This necessary interconnection has created elites in the fields of technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, economics, finance, political science, media and every other field.

In the face of the uncertainty and challenges that the future holds, which in many cases we cannot foresee, such as the recent case of the Covid 19 pandemic, we must be prepared and able to act accordingly. If we fail to anticipate a crisis, we must nevertheless be prepared and able to manage it. And this is achieved only through the creation of a knowledge society, human professional capacities, which in no case and under no circumstances can be replaced, nor can their role in the face of technology and other developments be minimized.

This should be the role of universities today, to create a well-trained, professional, courageous cadre to face the challenges that will face us. A degree without skills is like a car without a steering wheel. And we do not dare under any circumstances produce today people with degrees, but without direction. With this we would risk our future.

Besides helping the youth to get the attributes and personality traits that help them interact with others, it is highly important to raise their awareness about peace as the root of education. Peace education is important for everyone, but specifically for the youth who are still building their identity and the values they hold. When the youth is taught the value of peace along with other skills, they get equipped with the tools they need to be citizens that value relationship over competition and well-being over accomplishment.

So, my call here today is to adapt our studies and prepare the youth for the challenges we will face. Of course, in many cases we do not choose our challenges, but we can definitely create specialized resources to face them. And this should be the investment in today's youth, so that they are professionally capable, ready to value the dignity of others, and ready to face any challenge.

The future of the Balkans is in the hands of its youth. It's the duty of the youth to overcome the divisions and to build new bridges of trust for the future, to be an unwavering voice for a bright future for the Balkans, as an inevitable part of tomorrow's Europe.

Thank you all!

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