

UPF Europe and the Middle East ILC July-August 2022: London Session 5

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London, United Kingdom - Session V of the 2022 Europe-Middle East International Leadership Conference was titled "Conflicting Narratives and Values - Perspectives for a Common Vision and Culture of Peace."

The session was the last of three held in London on August 4, 2022, in the Peace Embassy. The Europe-Middle East (EUME) ILC was one of the International Leadership Conferences organized worldwide in the summer of 2022 on the overall theme "Towards Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula: Building a Global Culture of Peace."

The first two EUME sessions were held in Berlin on July 26; sessions 3, 4 and 5 were held in London on August 4; sessions 6 and 7 were held in Larnaca, Cyprus, and Tirana, Albania, both on August 5.



[Mrs. Chantal Chételat Komagata, Coordinator, UPF Europe](#)

Moderator Mrs. Chantal Chételat Komagata, the coordinator of UPF-Europe, in her welcoming remarks recalled her shock at the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on February 24. And yet, unsolved tensions and opposing narratives and value systems between liberal democracies in the West and countries once under the influence of the Soviet Union were bound to surface, she said.

We have indeed failed to properly address these issues, Mrs. Komagata said - for instance, individual rights and freedom vs. responsibility and traditional values, as well as globalization vs. safeguarding national sovereignty and cultures. A higher - universally applicable - vision may be needed to transcend these seemingly contradictory value systems.



[Ms. Caecilia van Peski, Academic Fellow, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Juniata College; Member, UN Senior Women Talent Pipeline, The Netherlands](#)

The first speaker was Ms. Caecilia Van Peski from the Netherlands, an academic fellow at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College and a member of the UN Senior Women Talent Pipeline.

As an educational cultural psychologist and a military commander in the Royal Dutch Navy, she always has been greatly interested in cultural relativism as well as the integrity of nations to make their own decisions. She mentioned a visit to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea with students of South Korea's Sungkyunkwan University, where she was teaching. At first, the students appeared to be 100 percent in favor of Korean reunification, but on closer inspection doubted its feasibility, especially considering the difference in mentality between the North and the South and the costs that unification would involve.

When working with Pora!, one of the biggest democratic youth movements in Ukraine, after the Orange Revolution, she was very inspired to see the aspirations those young people had for their country.

Children are not blank sheets of paper, Ms. Van Peski said. They inherit concepts and stereotypes from their environment and education, which sometimes need to be dealt with to level the road to peace. Bringing youngsters together at a very young age with projects such as those organized by CIVS International (Children's International Summer Villages), a non-religious, non-political organization, allows them to learn from each other and to put things into perspective.

Ms. Van Peski said the war in Ukraine is likely to last for a long time. She called upon the participants to take care of the refugees and to educate young people from an early age about universal values. She called for better leaders in society - both men and women - who do not aim solely at wealth and self-interest, but show thoughtfulness, empathy, respect and compassion.



[Dr. Willy Fautré, CEO and Director, Human Rights Without Frontiers International, Belgium](#)

Dr. Willy Fautré from Belgium, the CEO and director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International, reflected on the link between conflicting values and narratives, on the one side, and the outbreak of certain wars, on the other side. Internal conflicts and wars between neighboring countries do not suddenly emerge from a vacuum, as can be seen in Ethiopia or Ukraine. They are often the result of ongoing tensions deeply rooted in history or conflicting narratives.

He gave the example of Vladimir Putin's well-known and well-oiled narratives in his successive wars. Already when leading the second Chechen war, 1999-2000, the Russian president would not call it a war but a "special anti-terrorist operation" against separatists to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. In 2008, Russia fomented the separatist war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, recognized their independence and has since provided them with so-called military protection. Putin's narrative to justify his aggression was that he wanted to save the Russian-speaking Georgians.

Joseph Stalin's annexation of Crimea to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine happened by mistake,

according to Putin, who said that the inhabitants of the peninsula are historically Russian. This is the narrative Putin has been serving up to the entire Russian population and to the international community.

As to conflicting narratives, Dr. Fautré said that totalitarian or dictatorial societies do not tolerate a confrontation of ideas. For instance, religious diversity in Russia has been progressively eliminated. The independent media have been closed, or have survived only abroad.

In Putin's narrative, the Slavic-Orthodox identity of Russia must be protected against the decadent West. At this stage of the war in Ukraine, it is not the time to think about a common vision of a culture of peace for Russia and Ukraine. We should have done better in the past, Dr. Fautré said.

The viewpoints of Russia and Ukraine have become irreconcilable. Perhaps they will co-exist in their respective territories behind a cultural iron curtain after the war, Dr. Fautré said. This being said, the great dictatorial and conquering empires of the past are waking up in Moscow, Istanbul and Beijing. Both China and Putin's Russia oppose the expansion of Western values at home and in the world. It may be time now to think about avoiding a new hybrid global war.

[Click here for the full intervention of Dr. Willy Fautré](#)



[Hon. Nina Nováková, Member of the Parliament of the Czech Republic](#)

Hon. Nina Nováková, a member of Parliament of the Czech Republic, said that Europe has been a melting pot for philosophy, science and the arts, from where new ideas could spread rapidly. However, "anti-human" ideologies also have originated in and spread from Europe.

Europeans have moved away from the clear awareness that there is a God who is not only the creator of natural laws but also loves humans, Mrs. Nováková said. Europeans have come to believe that everything is governed by human laws. Individualism and freedom, selfishness and an ideology that relativizes truth, justice, and ultimately good and evil, may prevail. This paves the way of mediocrity.

Another model is totalitarianism, in which freedom of thought, belief, speech and religion is considered unnecessary, if not dangerous. Certain opinions and positions will be supported; all other opinions and expressions will be banned.

[Click here for the full intervention of Hon. Nina Nováková](#)



[Mr. Paul Gutteridge, Former UK Director, Initiatives of Change; Honorary Fellow, Edward Cadbury Centre, University of Birmingham](#)

Mr. Paul Gutteridge, the former UK director of Initiatives of Change and an honorary fellow at the Edward Cadbury Centre, University of Birmingham, mainly focused on the rise of Nazi and far-right activities in the UK and Europe, and brokering relations between people in religious, political and business contexts.

Experience has shown that there are three ways to harmonize ideological differences and positions, Mr. Gutteridge said. First, there is the environmental approach, i.e., making agreements between groups of

people who are in conflict over land or trade, for example.

Secondly, after an agreement has been reached about what to do environmentally, there is the question of how to implement it. In the event of a disaster, for instance, immediately applicable solutions to problems are needed.

Thirdly, the philosophical way looks at the reasons for a specific situation, how we look at life and each other, and within which frame we act and behave. This is actually a very difficult way to go. We must be mindful of other people's backgrounds. There may have been a power imbalance, favoritism, violation of the law, a lack of trust.

Mr. Gutteridge gave three ways to cooperate between religion, economics, ideological differences and politics. First, there is the cultural approach, which expects the other to integrate and adapt.

Next, there is the crusader approach, according to which we believe that we can export, if not impose, our value system and way of life to other nations. This is a more aggressive version of the cultural approach.

Mr. Gutteridge said that we need a third, philosophical way and an understanding that we are all different. This is the best way to bring to the table faiths, political, economic and structural thinkers, in an environment in which we are prepared to be the first to step back and cross the road to the other.

UPF and other international organizations, proponents of a better world, encourage national and international dialogue between different worldviews and philosophies, he said, because there is a desire for a better world in each and every one of us.



The question-and-answer session included the following:

Question: How to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in individuals, families and veterans after the Ukrainian war ends?

Ms. Van Peski said we don't know when the war will be over. Even though the Ukrainian population is relatively young, vibrant and very energetic, prolonged stress will be very harmful. Therefore, we have to start working on reconstruction and psycho-social care already now.

Question: New rights have been added to the legislation of our liberal democracies in an attempt to increase the sense of freedom and to solve discrimination toward minority groups. Nations in Africa and former East Bloc countries are rejecting exactly this. What is your viewpoint on the trend of expanding these individual rights and the consequences thereof?

Dr. Fautré: First, we have unchangeable and inalienable universal natural rights granted to all humans, such as the right to live, to freedom of movement, freedom of thought, religion or belief.

We also have a so-called new category of rights, such as the right to pure air, abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriages, which are widely and freely debated in our liberal democracies.

The European countries, often characterized by a kind of historical messianism, want to share, or

sometimes impose, their values on other parts of the world. Churches established in former colonies often have retained their traditional values inherited from the past. They will more easily oppose those new laws, as they are sometimes perceived as a new phase of cultural colonialism. This trend, which also can be found in Muslim countries, has been accelerated by Putin's war against Western values.

Question: The UPF founders teach that opposing trends found in the world can be healed and overcome only if we understand that we all come from the same origin, the same Heavenly Parent. What do you think of this, and how can we make it happen?

Mr. Gutteridge: The UPF founders are right indeed. Anthropological studies have shown that the family, education, politics, business, spirituality and religion all have an influence. To create any systemic change in society, spirituality and religions need to be addressed.

When atheists describe the God they do not believe in, and believers describe the God they do believe in, they sometimes find out, to their great surprise, that they believe in the same principles. Excluding the religious aspect from society is like cutting one leg of a table.



[Mrs. Patricia Earle, vice president of Women's Federation for World Peace \(WFWP\), United Kingdom](#)

To conclude the session, Mrs. Patricia Earle, the UK vice president of Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an organization that is affiliated with UPF, spoke about a Peace Garden service project that the federation has launched in the city of Birmingham. Young people of different ages, with different upbringings and cultural backgrounds, are creating a park together that is to become a meeting place, a place of relaxation, an oasis of peace. Through teamwork they learn to get along with each other and forge close friendships. As a token of appreciation, they receive a certificate and are encouraged to do something in their community or congregation. They also are offered the opportunity to speak at the national parliament and to receive a special award.





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Intervention of Dr. Willy Fautré in the EUME ILC July-August 2022: London Session 5

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Written by Dr. Willy Fautré, Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, Belgium

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Conflicting values and conflicting narratives leading to wars

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

Internal conflicts and wars between neighboring countries do not suddenly break out from a vacuum as it is can be seen in Ethiopia or in Ukraine. They are often the results of ongoing tensions deeply rooted in history or in conflicting and even aggressive narratives. The wars in the Balkans after the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s were the last example of it in the 20th century. National, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities exacerbated by biased and inflammatory narratives in the political discourse, in the media and in school education as well as territorial claims were at the heart of massacres perpetrated for several years in former Yugoslavia. The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020 is another example of the dramatic consequences of long-standing violent rhetoric grounded in irredentist nationalism.

On 24 February, to everyone's surprise, the Russian army invaded Ukraine from the north, the south and the east. But this should not have been a surprise. Since the duo Dmitry Medvedev - Vladimir Putin came to power in Moscow, Russia has been waging war ever.

Putin's narratives in his successive wars

In 1999-2000, Vladimir Putin led the second Chechen war as Prime Minister. His publicly stated goal was the eradication of the Chechen nation. According to Putin's narrative, it was not a war but a "special anti-terrorist operation" against separatists to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. During this operation, the capital Grozny was completely razed to the ground by Russian bombing, to the extent that in 2003 the United Nations called Grozny "the most destroyed city on earth". Since then, the Ukrainian city of Mariupol has probably overtaken it.

In 2008, Russia fomented the separatist war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, recognised their independence and has since provided them with the so-called protection from its military. Putin's narrative to justify his aggression was to save the Russian speakers of Georgia.

Since 2014, the Ukrainian territories of the Donbas and Crimea have been wrested from Ukraine. About the annexation of Crimea, Putin's narrative was that Staline had attached Crimea to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine by mistake and the inhabitants of the peninsula were historically Russian. As to the conflict in Donbas, Putin's rhetoric was that it was an internal conflict between persecuted and discriminated Russian-speaking Ukrainians and their nationalist government in Kyiv but he claimed he was not involved. However, everybody knows that he was using the separatists as proxies to destabilize Ukraine.

In Syria, in 2015-2018, Putin's war led to massive destruction. Officially, it was to help dictator Bashar al-Assad defeat ISIS and other Islamist terrorist groups. It was also to protect Christians and their churches from these groups and thus appear as the great and only defender of Christianity in the Middle East, especially Orthodoxy, a path that

European governments were reluctant, to take for various reasons. Vladimir Putin was very publicly thanked by Eastern Orthodox church dignitaries for his military involvement in Syria.

However, behind this official narrative there was also the plan to rid Bashar al-Assad of his various political opponents, at the cost of massacring civilians, destroying homes, hospitals, schools, and infrastructure providing water and electricity to the population. Aleppo became a martyred city and Russia lost its seat on the UN Human Rights Council as a result.

Putin's narrative is well known and well oiled. He is now applying it in the rest of Ukraine as he has done in all his other previous wars.

Putin's dream of resurrecting the Russian Empire

In Putin's narrative, Ukraine as a sovereign state never existed in the past and was called "Little Russia." The current Ukrainian state is an artificial state run by Nazis, Ukrainian identity does not exist and the Ukrainian language is an offshoot of the noble and rich Russian language, according to Putin. The country must be allegedly denazified and disarmed. Ukraine is part of the Slavic world and therefore part of Russia, just like Belarus, he says. The current Ukrainian state, its language and culture must be destroyed. Its territory must be invaded by war whatever the cost, occupied and Russified again; its remaining inhabitants and their future generations must be colonised. This is the narrative that Putin is serving up to the entire Russian population and to the international community.

The Ukrainian counter-narrative is that Kyiv existed long before Moscow and was the cradle of Orthodoxy, first with the conversion of Prince Vladimir in Kherson by a bishop of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and then with the baptism of his people in Kyiv Rus in 988, while the first written records of Moscow's existence date back only to 1147, 160 years later.

The war with its cynical procession of terror, war crimes and crimes against humanity enables Putin to depopulate the country through mass migrations to the West and mass deportations of Ukrainians to the East, to Russia. The territories occupied since 2014 have been colonised and Russified. All Orthodox churches that were not under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate have been eradicated, as have been other religions which did not recognise the annexation of Crimea and Putin's rule.

Conflicting narratives?

But let us go back to the title of this session, which contains two key words: conflicting narratives. In totalitarian or dictatorial societies, there can be no confrontation of ideas. In the case of Putin's Russia, there is only one truth: the one of the Leader. Putin has been preparing his war against Ukraine for a very long time. For two decades, he has built up a colossal armament, including nuclear weapons. With the blessing of Patriarch Kirill, he has progressively eliminated religious diversity, for example by criminalising the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist. About a hundred of them are in prison for many years and many more are on the same path. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been expelled from Russia. All Russian NGOs receiving money from the West, including the European Union, have been accused of being foreign agents and banned.

The editor of Novaya Gazeta, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2021, had to close his newspaper to avoid going to prison. All independent media have been closed, fined heavily or have survived only abroad. More than 3,000 websites have been closed. A law has criminalized the use of the word "war" in public and private spaces, providing sentences of up to 15 years in prison. Public anti-war demonstrations have been prohibited, and even individual silent picketing.

Putin's instrumentalisation of the Russian Orthodox Church and vice versa

In Putin's narrative, the claimed Slavic-Orthodox identity of Russia is strongly intertwined. This identity is supposed to be threatened by a decadent West that 'advertises' homosexuality, same-sex marriages, gender culture and other so-called decadent values in opposition to the traditional values of the Orthodox Church. A Western world that believes itself to be invested with a civilizational and civilizing mission and that it wants to impose on the rest of the world, including Russia and other Slavic lands, by financing NGOs, human rights organisations and media importing its pseudo-values into Russia. A messianism that has produced genocidal colonialism and supremacist imperialism for centuries, according to Putin. Hence the need to protect, vaccinate and purify Russian society against this Western plague.

Patriarch Kirill and the President have long been staunch allies in this fight against the West and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church has blessed the war on Ukraine as a metaphysical war against evil forces. The growing desire of Ukraine to divorce itself from the Russian world and to make a new life for itself with another partner, the European Union based on democratic values, had become an existential threat to Russia. This 'infidelity' in a forced marriage had to be brought to an end. Hence the appalling war we are witnessing.

Let us return to the question in the title of this session "What are the prospects for a common vision of a culture of peace?" What are the prospects in the case of Russia and Ukraine? This question is coming too late because the war is too far advanced and perhaps we should have better worked on this issue in the West and in Ukraine in due time. Maybe the outcome would have been different but maybe not. So, the answer is now very simple and very short:

these prospects are nil because the values of Russia and Ukraine have become irreconcilable. At most they could co-exist in their respective territories after the war, behind a cultural iron curtain. Maybe or maybe not.

Without wishing to play the Cassandra, however, I would dare say that there is something more serious ahead. Putin's war in Europe against democratic values is only the first wide scale assault on the West. The great dictatorial and conquering empires of the past are waking up in Moscow, Istanbul and Beijing. China with its dictatorial regime is on the same path as Putin's Russia against the expansion of Western values at home and in the world. It may now be time to think about avoiding a new hybrid global war.

Question from MC: New rights have been added to the legislations of our liberal democracies, with the hope of solving discrimination towards minorities and increasing the sense of individual freedom. However our Western democracies are being rejected for that reason by nations in Africa and in the eastern bloc. Could you shortly give us your viewpoint on the trend of expanding individual rights and the consequence thereof?

Thank you for asking me this question because it is an important one that is almost never raised in the way you do it. It is a huge topic about which I can only make some short comments and highlight some trends.

What are those "new rights"?

I would like to categorize human rights in a different way:

Natural rights: the rights given to all humans, simply for the sake of being human. They are universal moral principles among all cultures and societies and can't be reversed by government laws. For this reason, natural rights are often called inalienable rights — rights that cannot be taken away: the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, the right not to be tortured, etc.

The rights granted or not by the state, or claimed from the state:

the right to abortion, the right to choose or to change one's sexual identity, the right to be recognized as transgender, the right to homosexuality, the right to same-sex marriage, the right for same-sex couples to adopt children, the right to euthanasia by the person concerned, etc.

The recognition of many of these rights has started in liberal democracies where there is enough freedom of expression and enough space for public debates without being repressed by the state. However, it took decades in our liberal democracies before the minds could start to accept that their traditional values could be questioned and discussed publicly in the media and in political arenas. Public opinion was and still is divided, discussions were and are still polarized on these issues both in countries with a diversity of religions or in secularized countries. However, a dynamic aiming at the integration of claims for such rights has gained impetus in our liberal democracies to make them more inclusive and less discriminatory. Human rights NGOs have played a decisive role in this dynamic. But we now notice the first signs of a setback in the United States and in some states of the EU.

What about the rest of the world outside the block of liberal democracies?

In Africa where Christian Churches settled at the time of the European colonization, Catholic, Anglican and Evangelicals churches largely keep entrenched in the so-called traditional values and reject the claims for the so-called new rights. In Muslim majority countries of Africa and Asia, the trend is the same.

The US, a number of EU countries and the EU have been investing a lot of money in the promotion of the so-called "new rights" under the influence of some lobbies. Relentless campaigns have been and are being carried out to export their new Western values.

This is largely perceived by the concerned target populations as some form of forced conversion to Western values, a new form of colonization and another face of their imperialism embedded in their ADN.

The rejection of the West and its values is also one of the reasons why Patriarch Kirill of Russia has blessed President Putin's war against Ukraine and the decadent West as a metaphysical war against evil forces.

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