

Balkan Leadership Conference: Executive Summary, Vienna, Austria

Gani Rroshi
November 11, 2022



Vienna, Austria -- Former Western Balkan heads of state, high-level officials and Balkans experts were the panelists at a one-day conference at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna-Vienna School of International Studies.

The Balkan Leadership Conference of November 11, 2022, titled "Western Balkan Countries and EU Relations – Challenges and Perspectives," was held jointly by the Europe-Middle East branch of UPF and the Podgorica Club of former heads of state of the Balkan Peninsula.

The approximately 150 participants included representatives from 17 embassies, scholars, and NGO representatives.

This event followed two UPF conferences on Western Balkan peace and security held in [April](#) and [June](#) of this year, co-sponsored by the Podgorica Club and the government of Kosovo, respectively.

In the context of the war in Ukraine and its impact on Western Balkan peace and security, respected statesmen from the region, as well as Austrian politicians and diplomats, offered their perspectives on the state of relations between the Western Balkans and the European Union.

Opening Panel

In his welcoming remarks, **Jacques Marion**, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, expressed his appreciation to the respected statesmen from the Western Balkans and Austrian politicians and diplomats who had come to give their insights.

Calling Vienna "the capital of the Northern Balkans," **Ambassador Emil Brix**, director of the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna, stated that as a result of the Ukraine war, we now tend to speak more urgently about the European security architecture and about making sure that the Western Balkans do not become front states in an ideological war between good and evil.

Ambassador Brix thanked the participants for coming to the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna. He praised the Podgorica Club for taking ownership of the situation in the region, and assured them of his continued support.

In recorded welcoming remarks, **Dr. Wolfgang Petritsch**, the president of the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, described the new situation that has arisen in Europe as a result of the Ukraine war and all the ripple effects in the region and beyond. He suggested that the Western Balkan nations should be included first in an accelerated process of accession to the European Union and encouraged all states that are already members of the EU to use their expertise and contribute to this process wisely. He concluded by saying that this conference in Vienna was taking place at the right time.

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, expressed his gratitude that the

conference could be held at such a distinguished place in Vienna. He mentioned two unforgettable events by the UPF founders, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon: their visit to North Korea in 1991 to meet President Kim Il Sung, which opened the gate for mutual respect and communication between North and South Korea; and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's speech in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, in 1992, when she emphasized peace in Eastern Asia through dialogue and mutual respect.



[Session 1: The EU and NATO – European Security Architecture and the Position of the Western Balkans in Light of the Russian Aggression against Ukraine](#)

Dr. Werner Fasslabend, the president of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, explained that there are three possibilities -- enmity, rivalry, or friendship. One lesson learned from the situation in Ukraine is that only friendship can win! He predicted that this last attempt to attain an empire will come to an end soon and that this will bring about a new momentum with new structures and new ideas.

Concerning membership of the European Union, Dr. Fasslabend suggested that those nations that have been waiting for some years should have the right to join at the same time as those that are showing an interest now, because of their acute situations.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, president of Albania (2002-2007) and Balkans chairman of the UPF association International Summit Council for Peace, spoke of the instability in the fragile Balkan region caused by the war waged by Russia against Ukraine, with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo being particular hot spots, but problems arising even in Montenegro. He gave an insightful explanation of the political situation in the region, saying that the EU member states do not fully realize how hazardous the situation is in the Western Balkans. He also cited the importance of understanding history before much-needed compromise and cooperation can be reached, as there are still historical issues of enmity that have not yet been addressed.

H.E. Stjepan Mesić, president of Croatia (2000- 2010), referred to the considerable consequences the current conflict has for the countries of Southeast Europe. If the economic situation worsens, the level of insecurity always rises, he said. The effects are felt in all of the European Union, and these are not short-term effects, but ones that will be felt for years to come. While stressing that the EU has a special responsibility for the stability of the so-called Western Balkans, he also emphasized the Open Balkan economic and political zone comprising Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia as a good path to a more stable future in Southeast Europe.

H.E. Mladen Ivanić, president of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2015-2017), explained how intertwined the situation is among the countries of the region. Being a Serb by origin, he shed light on the emotions of Serbia's population. They want to have all the comforts of belonging to the West, being close to the EU, he said, whereas the bombing of Belgrade in 1999 by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and NATO's support for the sovereignty of Kosovo, make them want to keep their distance from NATO. He expressed his hope that because of the situation in Ukraine, the EU might prioritize the accession of certain countries.

Hon. Goran Svilanović, Serbian minister of foreign affairs (2000-2004), stressed the role of the

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, whose goal has always been to maintain dialogue with Russia. He called on the EU to rethink its identity, not only concerning the Balkans or Eastern Europe but also to consider Northern Africa as part of Europe's identity. He suggested that the EU would have to be redefined once the war is finished, and pointed out that the EU already is losing lots of money because of the war and by not including the states of the Western Balkans in the union.

H.E. Enver Hoxhaj, the deputy prime minister of Kosovo (2017-2019), expressed that there was some expectation that there would be a shift of focus of the EU concerning the Western Balkans after the war, but we still have the same status quo since 2013 when Croatia joined the EU. He mentioned the necessity for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or the work of reconciliation, as occurred between the Germans and Jews, but that there was no trace of this in the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. In concluding, he expressed his hope that there would be some push from Europe or the United States for his country's accession, as occurred with Montenegro in 2006.



[Session 2: Western Balkans and the EU Accession Process Fatigue – Results, Responsibilities and Next Steps](#)

The second session was moderated by **Marinela Stefanc**, the secretary general of UPF-Austria.

H.E. Filip Vujanović, the president of the Podgorica Club and the president of Montenegro (2003-2018), presented an overview of the Podgorica Club, founded in Montenegro in February 2019. Referring to the next steps, he mentioned the Berlin Process set up by the EU to create a common regional market for the Western Balkans, which was agreed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2020. In November 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz sponsored the Berlin Process summit to reinstate the common regional market, which was signed by six Western Balkan states. Mr. Vujanović expressed his hope that it will benefit the local population and serve as a precondition to accelerate EU integration.

H.E. Rexhep Meidani, president of Albania (1997-2002), stated that NATO and EU accession are necessary for stability in the Western Balkans, and bemoaned the delayed EU integration process. Overall, the stalled EU accession process is a threat to democracy in the Western Balkans, Mr. Meidani said. He regards the Berlin Process as an opportunity for closer Balkan ties and a pillar for EU integration. Recently, six Western Balkan states agreed to facilitate free movement of citizens in the region and to grant mutual recognition of professional and academic qualifications. He concluded that this is crucial in easing tensions in the region and simplifying the accession process.

Dr. Valentin Inzko, the high representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina (2009-2021), emphasized in a video message the rule of law, justice, and the fight against corruption as core areas for improvement, to prevent the flight of young talented professionals from the Balkans. He highlighted three lessons learned: A mission should be completed based on the rule of law; frozen conflicts are potential trouble spots; a confrontational approach may be necessary to find solutions. To speed up the EU integration process, he recommended a type of flight simulator activity by participating in EU meetings on existing strategies for climate and health without voting rights at first.

H.E. Zlatko Lagumdžija, the deputy prime minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2001-2002), mentioned the role of the high representatives in establishing peace in the Balkans since the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995. The Ukrainians' fight for freedom will ensure a united Europe, he said, and he anticipates the

Western Balkans will join the EU by 2030. He is convinced that if the Western Balkans follow the Berlin Process, they could join the "European Economic Union" as a first step. Further possible steps include participation in the European Health Union and the European Green Deal. Unfortunately, many Balkan politicians lack interest in the EU, he said.

H.E. Jadranka Kosor, the prime minister of Croatia (2009-2011), referred to her visit to Brussels in 2009 as prime minister, where she found an EU tired of enlargement. The European Commission imposed stricter criteria on Croatia, incorporating Chapter 23, which required cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague in the judicial area in the fight against corruption and crime. Her government met all the requirements and signed the accession treaty in 2011. Leaders therefore should try harder to meet the requirements, she said, particularly in the fight against corruption and upholding the rule of law.

Hon. Lukas Mandl, a member of the European Parliament from Austria, stated that Europe is suffering from fatigue about its own destiny, particularly in relation to the Western Balkans. Referring to February 24 as a wake-up call, he stated that many are still asleep as the EU lacks courageous leadership who are prepared to take risks. He alluded to the vision of the late Austrian Vice Chancellor Erhard Busek, who desired that the Western Balkans join the EU together. EU membership for the Western Balkans is vital for European security and for Europe's international leverage, Mr. Mandl said. This meeting was a call to action to offer the next generation a fully integrated Europe, he said.

Dr. Michael Balcomb, a senior advisor to UPF for Europe and the Middle East, reminded the audience of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly in New York in 2005, when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan questioned its role. Simultaneously, at the founding of UPF in 2005, Dr. Sun Myung Moon highlighted the fundamental problem with the UN and all political institutions: Nations place self-interests first. Dr. Balcomb mentioned Dr. Moon's practical vision for peace – a highway linking Asia across the Bering Strait to the United States, which Dr. Moon argued would be less costly than war. Alluding to Mother Moon's visit to Tirana, Albania, in 2019, Dr. Balcomb recalled her motto -- "Forgive, Love, Unite" -- as a way to solve problems.



[Session 3: Youth, Peace and Security in Western Balkans – Moving Forward with the Energy and Optimism of the Next Generation](#)

The third session was moderated by **Jennifer Miftarofska** from the Austrian chapter of International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP), an organization that is affiliated with UPF.

Slobodan Martinović, advisor to the former president of Montenegro, H.E. Filip Vujanović, described the atmosphere in which he and the youth of his generation grew up after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. He mentioned three main challenges: changing the educational system to meet the standards of developed countries; resolving the unemployment problem, especially among young people; and the brain drain, in which young people are forced to find their future in Western countries and the United States. Greater cooperation between the Western Balkan countries and the EU is needed to resolve these problems, he concluded.

Aleksandar Savović, the chief of cabinet of former President Mladen Ivanić of Bosnia-Herzegovina, said the EU did not really have any strategy for dealing with the Balkans after the war. Rather than corruption,

the main problem of the justice system is the immaturity of the people doing the task, he said; the key to solving that is education. He said that more EU funding should go to educational projects within the Western Balkans, and that Bosnia-Herzegovina could become a pioneer and example for the rest of Europe. Logic and reason are needed to play a greater role in policy decisions, he concluded.

Lirjetë Avdiu-Vejsa, the chairwoman of the KĀ Cultural Association, Vienna, recounted her personal story: She is from Kosovo, but due to persecution, her family was forced to return to Montenegro, her father's country of origin. However, because of the limitations of the education system there, she eventually moved to Vienna to study, where she started to organize activities for the Albanian community. She expressed her hope that those who have benefitted from Western education will help their own countries in the future. Therefore, it is important to allow freedom of movement for the many bright, young people of the Balkans, she said.



Kirsty Rancier from Canada, the youth focal point for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, spoke about the UN's Youth, Peace and Security agenda, which stems from the groundbreaking Resolution 2250, adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council in 2015. She emphasized the importance of the UNODC's Youth Empowerment Accelerator Framework, which serves as a tool for UN entities to uphold the meaningful engagement of youth in different priority areas, allowing young people in the Western Balkans to contribute more.

Bogdan Pammer from Austria, the president of IAYSP for Europe and the Middle East, began with a quote from the founder of UPF and IAYSP, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who as a child fled North Korea and found a new life building a community of peace. In 2020 she said: "We cannot move forward with human-centered thinking and ideology." Mr. Pammer explained that he had just returned from conducting a "Peace Designer Training" in cooperation with a large university in Pristina, Kosovo, where they discussed a great deal about peace. He concluded by saying that true innovation is more likely to come from places in the Balkans than elsewhere.

The last speaker was **Luka Čekić**, an expert on the Western Balkans at the International Institute for Peace, Vienna, who reminded us of the late Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, who had the ability to motivate young people. We need leaders like this to come from inside the Western Balkans, rather than looking to the outside for solutions, Mr. Čekić said. The IIP has a Western Balkans Initiative with a Vision Plan 2030. One of its conclusions is the need for reconciliation, as was achieved with the German people after World War II. In conclusion, he stressed that there is no future without young people.

From reports by Jacques Marion, co-chair, UPF Europe and the Middle East; Johann Brunnbauer, coordinator, IMAP-Austria; Peter Haider, president, UPF-Austria; Renate Amesbauer, president, WFWP-Austria; Mary Hinterleitner, UPF-Austria; and Marinela Stefanc, secretary general, UPF-Austria.



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Session IIA

UPF Co-Sponsors Balkan Leadership Conference

Written by: Jacques Marion, co-chair, UPF Europe and the Middle East

02 April 2022



Hon. Vasilika Hysi

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) ([link to speech](#)); **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

unable to attend in person, **Mr. 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](#)).



Mrs. Carolyn Handschin moderated the session



The afternoon session, moderated by **Gani Rroshi**, 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 ([link to speech](#)). 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](#)).



President Alfred Moisiu



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.



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Balkan Leaders Focus on Region's Peace and Security

Written by: Jacques Marion, co-chair, UPF for Europe and the Middle East

11 June 2022



Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the co-chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East

Pristina, Kosovo—The prime minister of Kosovo was the keynote speaker at a Balkans Leadership Conference held under the auspices of the Government of Kosovo.

The conference, titled "Peace, Security and Development in the Western Balkans," was held on June 11, 2022, in Pristina's Swiss Diamond Hotel.

The Europe and Middle East chapter of UPF and its International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) and International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) organized the conference in partnership with the KosovaPress Agency, as well as two organizations that are affiliated with UPF: The Washington Times Foundation and the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP).

Attended by 250 participants representing 14 nations, the conference was honored by the presence of Kosovo's prime minister, **H.E. Albin Kurti**, and three members of his government, as well as three respected former presidents from Albania, Croatia, and Kosovo. Among the participants were current and former members of parliament, rectors and professors from various universities, and representatives of media agencies.

In the context of heightening East-West tensions, the conference addressed the impact of the Ukraine conflict on peace and security in the Western Balkans. While the region is moving toward Euro-Atlantic integration, it is the object of growing influence from Russia and China. Illustrating this competition, the day before the conference, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Kosovo as the first stop on his Balkans tour and expressed full support for Kosovo's integration into the European Union.

The conference addressed the role of the media in promoting peace and security in times of conflict, taking the case of the war in Ukraine, and pointing to the challenge of raising journalistic credibility in the Balkans. One session focused on cross-border youth exchange and cooperation in the region, and how it could increase youth civic engagement and political participation.

The opening plenary session on the theme "Peace and Security in the Western Balkans" was moderated by UPF Europe-Middle East Co-chair **Jacques Marion**. UPF-Kosovo Chair **Binak Ulaj** welcomed the participants, and **Dr. Katsumi Otsuka**, co-chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, offered introductory remarks on the significance of the conference.

In his keynote address, **Prime Minister Albin Kurti** described the fragility of peace in the region. He addressed the risk of moving toward frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe and denounced concerted efforts by some foreign powers to hinder the process of normalization, development, democratization, and integration in the Western Balkans.

The panelists were **President Alfred Moisiu** of Albania (2002-2007), **President Stjepan Mesić** of Croatia (2000-2010), **President Fatmir Sejdiu** of Kosovo (2006-2010), Austrian **Minister of Defense Werner**

(2000-2019), President **Atifm Bejta** of Kosovo (2000-2019), Russian Minister of Defense **Walter Fasslabend** (1987-1990 and 1990-2000), and Albanian **Deputy Prime Minister Senida Mesi** (2017-2019). In addition, Serbian **President Nataša Mičić** (2002-2004) sent a recorded message to the conference.

The discussion focused on destabilizing trends in the Western Balkans in the context of the Ukraine conflict, outlining the role of Serbia and the influence of Russia. While these trends also affect North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, it is the unresolved issue of Kosovo's recognition by Serbia that generates most of the tension in the region. As a representative of the Albanian people, who are the large majority in Kosovo and form strong minorities in North Macedonia and Montenegro, President Moisiu denounced the historical oppression of his people and highlighted the importance of Kosovo's independence for peace in the Balkans.



The panel and audience of the opening plenary session

The second panel addressed the theme of "Peace, Security and Development in the Western Balkans." Moderated by Hon. **Besa Ismaili Ahmeti**, a member of Kosovo's parliament, it included current and former government leaders from Balkan nations as well as political scientists: **H.E. Emilija Redžepi**, deputy prime minister of Kosovo (representing the Bosniak community); **Dr. Nano Ružin**, former ambassador of North Macedonia to NATO; **H.E. Slobodan Petrović**, former deputy prime minister of Kosovo (representing the Serb community); and **Dr. Arian Starova**, former Albanian minister of foreign affairs.

The panelists reviewed the political and economic situation in the Balkans, pointing to the need for rebuilding trust in the region. They noted the slow process of integration into the European Union and focused the discussion on the merits or demerits of the "Open Balkans" initiative, an economic agreement initiated by Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia to increase trade and improve bilateral relations. Panelists were divided on the project, with some emphasizing the positive complementarity of regional resources for development, and others fearing that it may re-create a political entity under Serbian, and possibly Russian, influence.



The two panels on the media were co-organized by **Peter Zoehrer**, European coordinator of UPF's International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), and **Skender Krasniqi**, the president of KosovaPress, a media leader in Kosovo and the current chair of the Association of Balkan News Agencies in Southeast Europe (ABNA). The theme was: "Ethical Reporting in Conflict Situations – Raising the Credibility of Journalism in the Balkans." Representatives from 15 Balkan news agencies attended the event.

The first of the two media panels was moderated by **Sofia Papadopoulou** from Greece, the editor in chief of the Athens News Agency-Macedonian Press Agency (ANA-MPA). The panelists were: **Peter Zoehrer**, IMAP coordinator for Europe; **Thomas McDevitt** from the United States, chairman of *The Washington Times*; **Skender Krasniqi**, president of KosovaPress; **Professor Dr. Predrag Vujović** from Serbia, president of P.R.A. Agency; **Professor Dr. Edmond Hajrizi** from Kosovo, president of the University of Business and Technology; and **Lutfi Dervishi**, a professor of journalism at the University of Tirana in Albania.





The second media panel was moderated by **Besa Luzha**, program coordinator at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kosovo. The panelists were: **Erman Yüksel** from Turkey, editor in chief of World Languages—Anadolu Agency; **Valbona Zhupa**, general director of the Albanian Telegraphic Agency; **Aimilios Perdikaris**, chairman of the Board of ANA-MPA in Greece; **Branka-Gabriela Vojvodić**, general director of the Croatian News Agency; and **Halit Hajdini**, deputy general director of the Media Information Agency in North Macedonia.



Both panels raised issues at the forefront of everyone's mind, as the war of information—and disinformation—is raging between Russia and Ukraine, impacting daily all of Europe and the rest of the world.

Panelists assessed challenges experienced by journalists in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole, beginning with the decline of public confidence in the media, while their impact on public opinion is unprecedented with the growing influence of social media.

Specific problems in the Balkans were described, although on different levels in different countries: the lack of independence from political parties or governments, the impact of commercialization, the trend toward tabloidization, the poor media literacy of the public, etc.

In the context of the Ukraine war, the discussion focused on questions of propaganda and disinformation. Panelists recalled that the term “media war” was coined during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, when “alongside mercenaries with Kalashnikovs there were also mercenaries with pens and microphones.”

Emphasis was given to the need for reforms, for more transparency in media ownership, for more pluralism, for information literacy, etc. And the question was raised: How can journalism constructively contribute to peacemaking? As coordinator of the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), **Thomas McDevitt** concluded: “We must be innovative in imagining and creating a new role for the media: the role of peace journalism. The way for the media to regain public respect is to become once again a free, independent, and responsible press.”

The session titled “Youth Interaction and the Future of the Balkans” was moderated by **Bogdan Pammer**, president for Europe and the Middle East of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP). The session highlighted the role and potential of young people for peace and development.

The panelists were: **Hon. Edona Maloku-Bërdyna**, Kosovo's deputy minister of education, science, technology, and innovation; **Dafina Peci**, executive director of the National Youth Congress of Albania; **Jasmin Spahić** of the Youth of the Atlantic Treaty Association of Bosnia-Herzegovina; **Amir Billali**, deputy director of the Agency of Youth and Sports in North Macedonia; and **Lirigzona Morina**, head of the International Office of Kosovo's University of Business and Technology.

The panelists described how school curricula in Kosovo are designed to provide quality education and foster youth interaction in the region. They stressed the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks that ensure young people's representation in policy cycles. They also described how the challenges of territorial fragmentation in a country like Bosnia-Herzegovina are overcome through patience and European Union support, and how divisions of the past are bridged through regional collaboration by the new generation in North Macedonia.

The panelists gave empowering messages to the youth and students present, who were keen to learn about

The participants gave empowering messages to the youth and students present, who were keen to learn about the speakers' paths and vision. The session concluded with four panelists being awarded as Youth Ambassadors for Peace. The awards were presented by **Koji Matsuda**, president of IAYSP International, who emphasized IAYSP's commitment to empowering youth and students to build new bridges and usher in a bright future in the region.



The conference concluded with an Assembly of the Ambassadors for Peace from Kosovo, under the direction of UPF-Kosovo Chair **Binak Ulaj**; parliamentarian **Hydajet Hyseni**, a member of the UPF Global Council; and UPF-Kosovo Secretary General **Ejona Icka**. Representing leaders from the political, religious and academic fields, participants gathered for the election of the new National Peace Council of UPF-Kosovo.



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 Balkan Leadership Conference: Executive Summary

Written by: Mrs. Renate Amesbauer, President, WFWP Austria
 11 November 2022

**Balkan leadership conference "Western Balkan Countries and EU Relations – Challenges and Perspectives".
 Vienna, November 11, 2022.**

Opening Panel:



Jacques Marion, UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East

Moderator: Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-chair, UPF Europe & Middle East

Speakers:

- Ambassador Emil Brix, Director of the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna
- Dr. Wolfgang Petritsch, President of OIIP (video message)
- Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chair UPF Europe and Middle East

Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-chair, UPF Europe & Middle East

Jacques Marion, welcomed the participants and said that Russia's tragic aggression in Ukraine had sent shock waves around the world and caused great concerns in the Balkans region. He expressed his appreciation to the respected statesmen from the Western Balkans and Austrian politicians and diplomats with great experience and commitment to peace in this Region, who had come to give their insights.

Ambassador Emil Brix, Director of the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna:

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Brix pointed out that Vienna and the Diplomatic Academy have been a good meeting place for politicians from the Western Balkans for a long time, calling Vienna "the capital of the Northern Balkans". The Austrian position of helping the integration process as much as possible is hard work, not only in the region, but also among the member states of the European Union. Amb. Brix mentioned that one slightly more positive result, among all the terrible effects of the Ukraine war, is that we all tend to speak now more urgently about the European security architecture that is relevant to the whole of this continent, and about how can we make sure that the western Balkans do not become front states in an ideological war between good and evil.

Concluding his welcoming remarks, Amb. Brix said that he always liked regional initiatives, and that this is what the Podgorica Club is doing: taking ownership of the situation in the region. This is something that we have always been supporting throughout the years, so we are happy to give all the support we can give from my country and thank you for coming to the diplomatic academy in Vienna.

In his welcoming remarks (video), **Dr. Wolfgang Petritsch**, President of OIIP (Austrian Institute for International Affairs), described the whole new situation in Europe that has arisen with the Ukrainian war and all the ripple effects it has in the region and beyond.

Dr. Petritsch expressed the necessity for the E.U. to think in broader terms and expand rapidly. Of course, everyone is thinking about Ukraine, but before it can become a member of the European Union, he suggested that the nations of the Western Balkans should be included first in an accelerated process. He encouraged all states, who are already members of the E.U., to use their expertise and contribute to this

process wisely. He concluded by saying that this conference here in Vienna is taking place at the right time.

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chair UPF Europe and Middle East, greeted everyone on behalf of UPF and expressed his gratitude that the conference could be held at such a distinguished place in Vienna. "The hope of all ages has been to experience peace and prosperity", he said. However, especially during the past 25 years we have experienced how difficult it is to realize this. The Ukrainian war in particular has shown us that there is still a long way to go.

He expressed the opinion that divisions are very dangerous and must be taken care of almost immediately. Humanity in the past has not effectively taken care of local, national, regional and global divisions. This conference has great significance in that it brought together distinguished leaders from the Balkan Nations and from Austria.

Dr. Otsuka mentioned two unforgettable events by the UPF founders, that he thinks of at the end of every year. The first is the visit of Rev. Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han to North Korea in 1991, when they met President Kim Il Sung, which opened the gate for mutual respect and communication between North and South Korea. The other is Dr. Hak Ja Han's speech in the "Great Hall of the People" in Beijing, China, in December 1992, when she emphasized peace in Eastern Asia through dialogue and mutual respect. He concluded by wishing this conference good success.

First session: EU and NATO – European Security Architecture and the Position of the Western Balkans in the Light of the Russian Aggression against Ukraine



Dr. Werner Fasslabend, president of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy



Moderator: Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-chair, UPF Europe & Middle East

Speakers:

- Dr. Werner Fasslabend, *President, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy*
- H.E. Alfred Moisiu, *President of Albania (2002-2007); Chairman of ISCP Balkans*
- H.E. Stjepan Mesić, *President of Republic of Croatia (2000- 2010)*
- H.E. Mladen Ivanić, *President of Bosnia Herzegovina (2015-2017)*
- Hon. Goran Svilanovic, *Minister of Foreign Affairs, Serbia (2000 – 2004)*
- H.E. Enver Hoxhaj, *Prime Minister of Kosovo (2017 -2019)*

Dr. Werner Fasslabend, President of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, pointed out the closeness of the Balkans to Austria, and that back in history Homo Sapiens reached central Europe through the Balkan Region, after crossing the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, thus showing the interconnectedness of the regions.

He stated that the example of the situation in Ukraine clearly shows that war is no longer a means of changing borders. He explains that there are three possibilities: enmity, rivalry, or friendship. One lesson that came out very clearly is that only friendship can win! One cannot force any country anymore into one's own system! One has to shape the political solution based on friendship in order to be successful. There might be many obstacles, but they have to be faced, because there is no alternative, not at that moment and not in the future.

He believes that this last attempt to attain an empire will soon come to an end and this will bring about a new momentum with new structures and new ideas. Dr. Fasslabend referred to the wealth of experience Austria has gained in dealing with minorities: Austria being surrounded by a great variety of nationalities has found a way of successfully dealing with minority issues, last but not least being the 'South Tyrol Solution'.

The solution to conflict situations with minorities, Dr. Fasslabend said, is not in changing state borders, but in unifying and bringing about integration. Concerning membership of the European Union, he suggested that those nations that have been waiting already for some years should have the right to join at least at the same time as those that are showing an interest now, because of their acute situations.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, President of Albania (2002-2007) and Chairman of ISCP Balkans

H.E. Alfred Moisiu started by expressing how thankful he is that the Podgorica Club and UPF share the same concerns about the West Balkan Region. This unforeseen outbreak of war waged by Russia against Ukraine contributes to the instability of this already fragile region, with Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo being particular hotspots, but problems are arising even in Montenegro. He criticized the local political leaders for their lack of humanism and responsibility.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu gave an insightful explanation of the political situation in the region and shared his impression that although some efforts are being made, the E.U. member states do not fully realize how hazardous the situation is in the Western Balkans. He exhorted us not to view him as a nationalist troublemaker, but to understand his strong desire to find the best possible way to turn this corner of Europe into a safe, peaceful and sustainable region. For this to happen, he said, Europe would need to change its tactics, not provoking, but asking for honesty and determination.

He also cited the importance of understanding history, before the much-needed compromise and cooperation can be reached, as there are still historical issues of enmity that have not yet been addressed, and that this would be necessary in order to find peaceful and sustainable solutions for the future. In concluding, H.E. Alfred Moisiu urged everyone present in this honorable gathering to rise to a European consciousness.

[Click here for the full intervention of H.E. Alfred Moisiu](#)

H.E. Stjepan Mesić, President of Republic of Croatia (2000- 2010)

H.E. Stjepan Mesić began by expressing how much he wished he could talk about a postwar situation concerning the Ukraine and programs of reconstruction and reconciliation, but sadly this is not the case and his heart goes out to all the victims of this war. He referred to the considerable consequences this has for the countries of Southeast Europe, e.g., the rise of food and energy prices. These are not harmless realities, as economic, strategic and political security are always strongly intertwined. If the economic situation worsens, the level of insecurity always rises. The effects are felt in the whole of the European Union, and these are not short term effects, but ones that will be felt for years to come.

He suggested that what Southeast Europe needs most is good cooperation, in order for progress to be made, and that this needs political wisdom and thoughtful decisions. The E.U. has a special responsibility for the stability of the so-called Western Balkans, and it is of great importance that the region be able to trust in the strength and credibility of the E.U.

On the other hand, H.E. Stjepan Mesić stated that besides the above-mentioned cooperation, the hand that will help the Western Balkans the most is its own hand, and that is why he would emphasize the 'Open Balkans initiative' as a good path to a more stable future in Southeast Europe, both economically and politically. He concluded by thanking the audience for their attention!

H.E. Mladen Ivanić, President of Bosnia Herzegovina (2015-2017)

H.E. Mladen Ivanić expanded on how intertwined the situation is among the countries of the region and, being a Serb by origin, he shed light on the emotions of the population of the Republic of Serbia. On the one hand, they want to have all the comforts of belonging to the west, being close to E.U. On the other hand, the bombing by NATO of Belgrade at the end of the Balkan war, and NATO's support for the sovereignty of Kosovo, make them want to keep their distance from NATO.

H.E. Mladen Ivanić also expressed that extreme positions in conflicts are counterproductive, because if you have a winner, the loser will just wait for another chance to try to win. A one-way approach is never of any help anywhere; rather, a balanced approach is needed. Therefore, for the countries in the region to become members of the European Union all together would be of great help.

However, he expressed his pessimism recalling an experience in 2006 at the time when he was in Brussels representing the All People's Party and heard some delegates saying that after Croatia there would be a pause in E.U. accession, because of the institution's inability to digest any more new members.

Now the situation seems to be changing, however, because of the situation in Ukraine, and priority might be given to certain countries. However, he emphasized that for the Balkan nations it is very important that the rules be the same for everyone. H.E. Mladen Ivanić concluded by thanking the audience for their attention.

Hon. Goran Svilanovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Serbia (2000 – 2004)

Hon. Svilanovic thanked the organizers and the Diplomatic Academy for making its premises available for this conference and expressed his special appreciation for the large audience who were interested in this topic. Hon. Svilanovic pointed to the role of the OSCE, whose goal has always been to try to maintain the dialogue with Russia. The relationship with Russia will have to be re-thought, he said.

He called on the E.U. to re-think its identity, not only concerning the Balkans or East Europe, but also to consider also the North African region as part of Europe's identity. In Vienna, Austria, that connectedness is perhaps less evident, but France or Spain, for example, have strong ties with the North-African nations. In this respect, Hon. Svilanovic called on the E.U. member states to rethink their engagement concerning issues such as food security and wellbeing, which often cannot be guaranteed.

The current situation has forced these countries to consider many important issues, such as the availability of raw materials and pharmaceuticals, and the need for the free exchange of knowledge in this area. In this context, the potential mining of lithium in Serbia is an important topic. Definitely, the E.U. has to be redefined once the war is finished, he said. Already the E.U. is losing lots of money because of the war and by not including the states of the Western Balkans in the Union.

H.E. Enver Hoxhaj, Prime Minister of Kosovo (2017 -2019)

H.E. Enver Hoxhaj praised the Vienna Diplomatic Academy for providing education of the highest quality to past and present leaders, even beyond Europe. He expressed that in February this year there was some expectation that, once this war is finished, there would be a geopolitical revival and a shift of focus of the European Union concerning the Western Balkan region. However, this did not happen, so we still have the same status quo since 2013 when Croatia joined the E.U.

H.E. Enver Hoxhaj said he also saw the return of the dark forces of nationalism, which we all thought

belonged to the past. He further mentioned the necessity for “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” or the work of reconciliation, as occurred between the Germans and Jews, and which he had the chance to experience in 1966. He said that he unfortunately did not see any trace of this in the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo.

In concluding, H.E. Enver Hoxhaj expressed his hope that there would be some push from Europe or the U.S.A. for his country to be accepted [into the E.U.], as occurred with Montenegro in 2006. He expressed his gratitude to the organizers for creating the space to discuss those issues.



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ILC2021-7 Session 7 - Imagining a Unified World: The Youth's Contribution to Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Written by: Mrs. Mariela Stefanc, Secretary General, UPF Austria

11 November 2022

Balkan leadership conference "Western Balkan Countries and EU Relations – Challenges and Perspectives".

Vienna, November 11, 2022.

Session 3: Youth, Peace and Security in Western Balkans-moving forward with the energy and optimism of the next generation.



Jennifer Miftarofska from the Austrian chapter of Youth and Students for Peace

Moderator: Ms. Jennifer Miftarofska, Youth and Students for Peace (YSP), Austria

Speakers:

- **Slobodan Martinović**, advisor to the former president of Montenegro, Filip Vujanović
- **Aleksandar Savović**, Chief of Cabinet of President Ivanic, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **Lirjetë Avdiu-Vejša**, Chairwoman, KĀ Cultural Association, Vienna
- **Kirsty Rancier**, Youth Focal Point, UNODC, Youth Empowerment Accelerator
- **Bogdan Pammer**, President of IAISP, Europe and Middle East
- **Luka Cekic**, Western Balkan Expert, International Institute for Peace, Vienna

Summary

The speakers shared their views and perspectives as youth leaders or activists in different fields of socio-economic and political life, such as corruption in leadership and important state institutions; political correctness being a big hindrance in the educational system, which needs to be lifted in order to protect a good educational system that promotes good values; prevention of violence and drug abuse to create safer countries and communities and that has to be done in close cooperation with respective governments; freedom of movement and encouragement to return and implement the expertise gained abroad in their countries of origin and more.

But they also appealed to the new generation of Balkan countries to become pioneers of many new developments and not wait to receive help, but on the contrary inspire new ways of doing things. From their viewpoint, young people not only represent the future, but are also the present, and that is why it is very important that they are involved in the peace building processes, cooperate closely with the governments Leaders, and politicians need their attention.

People have to move from their past with true love. The youth might not have the solution to the situation, but they must be part of it. There is commitment on their side to work on mental health issues and strengthen family values. Another recommendation made was that the young people from the Balkan region should be brought together in places where atrocities occurred so that they can learn from factual history, in order to not repeat it.

Report:

The third session was moderated by Jennifer Miftarofska from Youth and Students for Peace (YSP), Austria, and was titled: Youth, Peace and Security in Western Balkans-moving forward with the energy and optimism of the next generation. In her opening words she mentioned that "Young people play a crucial role in efforts

for stability and peace and in strengthening social cohesion in societies. It is very important to listen to their concerns and aspirations, supporting their active participation in the decisions that shape their societies and by fostering opportunities for young people to meet and build relationships across ethnic, religious and geographic lines. Placing young people at the centre is the right strategy for empowering a new generation to find the solutions to challenges yet to be resolved and for creating a strong force for a more peaceful and sustainable world.”

The first speaker was **Slobodan Martinović**, advisor to the former president of Montenegro, Filip Vujanović. Prior to that he worked as a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Montenegro, dealing with bilateral relations with the neighboring countries. He was also a teaching assistant at the University of European Studies. In his words he described the atmosphere he and the youth of his generation were born and grew up with, and it is exactly that which was experienced after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. He mentioned that there are three main issues that need to be addressed:

Firstly, the educational system has to change and meet the standards of the developed countries. Secondly, unemployment is among the highest in Europe and within that category, this percentage is even higher among the young people. The third issue he addressed was the brain drain. Young people are forced to leave and find their future in western countries and the USA.

A change of narrative is really needed, and this can be achieved through more cooperation with the Western Balkan countries and the EU, and we have to look forward to the future in a more optimistic way. “Conferences like this where we can exchange our opinions give me hope that things will work”, he concluded.

The second speaker was Mr. **Aleksandar Savović**, Chief of Cabinet of President Ivanic, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He expressed that the E.U. did not really have any strategy for dealing with the Balkans after the war. The justice system was reformed by installing new young judges and prosecutors without any experience or knowledge of the past.

Many people say that the problem with the justice system is corruption, but he expressed that the main problem is the immaturity of the people doing the task and the key to solving this problem is education. One of the key reforms in Europe was the Bologna Process, however he felt that in many ways the education system in B&H was better before the war than it is now. However, since it cannot get any worse than it is already, B&H would be a good place to try out new ways to improve the education system. In this way, B&H could become a pioneer and example for the rest of Europe. He expressed that more EU funding should be diverted to educational projects within the Western Balkans. Also, it is currently difficult for students from B&H to obtain visas to travel to other countries during their studies. In conclusion, he said that logic and reason, rather than emotions, needed to play a greater role in policy decisions.

The third speaker was **Lirjetë Avdiu-Vejsa**, Chairwoman, *KĀ* Cultural Association, Vienna, who was standing in for Mr. Bahri Troja, Austrian Integration Fund; Director, Albanians’ Peace Council, who would have given a talk about the integration process in Austria, and gave her more personal perspective of such integration. She explained that she is from Kosovo, but her father is from Montenegro and her mother is of Albanian origin from Kosovo, but always teased her that she is Montenegrin, which she struggled with. Due to persecution during the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, her parents lost their apartment and their jobs and were forced to return to Montenegro. It took her a long time to adapt to this new community.

Also, because of the limitations of the education system there, she eventually moved to Austria to study. This was also possible, because Montenegro being a small country, they are obliged to learn other languages, so she already understood German. However, her integration was not so simple, because she was very much tied to her cultural roots. In this way, she came to organize activities for the Albanian community in Vienna. In conclusion, she hoped that many who have benefitted from western education will be able to help their own countries in the future and that European integration can best come about through the exchanging of our cultures, rather than changing them. Therefore, it is important to allow freedom of movement for the many bright, young people of the Balkans.

The fourth speaker was Ms. **Kirsty Rancier**, Youth Focal Point, UNODC, Youth Empowerment Accelerator, who explained that she comes from Canada and cannot provide any personal experience of the Balkans but is grateful to those who did. However, she does have experience implementing the UN’s Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. She went on to explain that “young people want to participate in peace processes. Young people in many countries and communities are the majority of the population and, when the decisions are made about young people and for young people, they should be made with young people, and this is really the basis for them to be involved.” She explained that the YPS agenda stems from the ground-breaking resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council, on 9 December 2015, which recognizes that “*young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security*”, and since then there have been several supplementary resolutions. This has led for the first time to young people briefing the Member States in the Security Council. She did, however, also mention the importance of intergenerational dialogue.

She went on to explain about the work of her organization, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in which she is involved in many anti-violence projects, but more recently in youth led efforts to combat terrorism. This includes the Balkans where it is also important to enable youth to develop their wellbeing and interpersonal skills that help prevent violence and drug use and abuse. She emphasized the importance of the Youth Empowerment Accelerator (YEA!) framework of UNODC which serves as a tool for UN entities to uphold the meaningful engagement of youth in different priority areas, including peace and security, and which will hopefully allow young people from across the world, including in the Western Balkans, to contribute more.

The fifth speaker was Mr. **Bogdan Pammer**, President of IAYSP, Europe and Middle East, who began by quoting from the founder of UPF and YSP, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who herself as a young woman fled from North Korea and found a new life building a community of peace. She said in 2020. “Don’t be an onlooker if you can’t see the future. We cannot move forward with human centered thinking and ideology”. He explained

that he had just returned from conducting a Peace Designer Training in cooperation with a large university in Pristina, where they discussed a great deal about peace. He also met a lot of young people on his recent travels around the Balkans region but concluded that young people don't necessarily have the answer, because we need to go beyond human centered thinking.

Mr. Pammer said that "It is at the cracks of society where true innovations and true solutions come forward and that is why we should be inspired about the Balkan region. As we heard, the brain drain can become an asset if you see it the other way around, creating networks with communities, with people of international backgrounds." He invited everyone to come to Pristina on May 16, 2023, on the International Day of Living Together in Peace, for the conclusion of the Peace Designer Training. He expressed that true innovation is more likely to come from places in the Balkans than elsewhere.

The last speaker was **Luka Cekic**, Western Balkan Expert, International Institute for Peace, Vienna, who began by asking where is the will of the people to change something in the western Balkans? "It takes small steps to make big steps", he said. He then reminded us of the late Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, who had the ability to motivate the young people. Disagreeing slightly with the previous speakers, he said that we need leaders like this to come from inside the Western Balkans, rather than looking to the outside for solutions. "We should accept that the EU is not capable of solving our problems, because it has its own problems", he said.

The International Institute for Peace has a Western Balkans Initiative with a Vision Plan 2030. One of their conclusions is that reconciliation is very much necessary, because we are still very much divided into groups and are blaming each other for the horrors of the war. Given that reconciliation has been achieved with the German people after WWII, he asked why it would not be possible to bring young Serbian people to Srebrenica, for example. In conclusion, he stressed that there is no future without the youth.

The session was concluded with questions from the audience that received multiple responses from almost all the panelists, which showed once again their engagement and commitment to the theme of this session.



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