

UPF Vienna, Austria: Conference on recent attack on civilians in central Vienna

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November 10, 2020



Vienna, Austria -- UPF-Austria held an online conference to address the recent attack on civilians in central Vienna.

On the evening of November 2, 2020, a gunman opened fire with a rifle in the city center, killing four persons and injuring 23 others. The attacker, who was killed by police, was a 20-year-old with dual Austrian and North Macedonian citizenship and was known to be a supporter of Islamist groups.

Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, led the November 10 meeting, in which four diverse speakers shared their expertise and views.

Mr. Haider asked how such radicalization could take place. He referred to an Austrian Peace Road event that had been completed just a week before the attack. Citing American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of social needs, as interpreted by film director [Joshua Sinclair](#), he said that the issue of prestige and dignity as a basic human need encourages us to look further.

Dr. Zekirija Sejdini, a professor of Islam in modern society at the Philological-Cultural Science Faculty of the University of Vienna, said that terrorism has been present for the last 20 years. We would be ill-advised to believe we can eliminate it completely or ignore it. It is irrelevant whether the radicalization is religious, political, national, left wing or right wing, he said. These groups that recruit are specialized groups that know how to hook their targets – weak, susceptible to radicalization, people who seek recognition, a position, often very young, those who have experienced discrimination.

Professor Sejdini was in Vienna at the time of the attack and said he felt shocked and personally hurt. He commented that Balkan Islam is a little different from Arab Islam. Although the terrorist had roots in North Macedonia, he was socialized in Austria. This has nothing to do with the Islam of the Balkans, Professor Sejdini said. The gunman, who was born and grew up in Austria, is a product of his context, of the world open society we have here, which is vulnerable. The people behind these terror acts should be held accountable, he said. The success of such activities depends on the reaction of society. These groups can create division, but if people unite, such acts of terror cannot be successful.

Dr. Helga Kerschbaum of the NGO Committee on Peace, United Nations, Vienna, was a judge in Vienna, studied in Kyoto, Japan, lived in Paris, France, and Cape Town, South Africa. Speaking of South Africa during and after apartheid, she said that Nelson Mandela included all people in his solution, building bridges, leaving nobody behind. In her book [Culture of Benevolence](#), published in 2004, she suggests we should want to get on with each other, just because we are here together. "I want to live, and I want that you live. We all care that we all exist well."

DI Ian Banerjee, an architect, town planner and educational researcher at Technical University Vienna, said that he had been in the area of the attack as a professor and senior researcher, and as a city planner he wanted to observe the situation. There was a certain serenity, recognizing the fact but not getting affected

by it, he said.

The next day Mr. Banerjee reflected on the emergency feeling. It reminded him of the terror attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. He was in New York two weeks after those attacks, and he perceived a feeling of solidarity. He said that the sea of candles at the attack site in Vienna was just like in New York.



Mr. Banerjee said that because urban innovation is his theme, he has visited over 50 cities. Cohesive forces hold a society together, and there are those that divide a society, he said. Terrorists want to drive us apart. People have managed to foster cohesive forces. This is a theme in city planning, to use the cohesive power of society, developing special techniques to use the collective cohesiveness of society to strengthen. The melting pot of big cities is very rich. Digitalization is bringing us a new world.

Dr. Stefan Stoev, founder of the non-profit cultural organization [IDEA Society](#), said he is convinced that people who create do not destroy, and that art and culture play an important role. Youth need to see that they can contribute to culture and art, he said. This soft power is a diplomatic power. "My desire for my children and all children is that they learn how things are created and do not destroy. I gain hope for the future by recognizing talent all over the world in youth for art and culture."

UPF-Austria President Peter Haider explained that 15 years ago, Chechen refugees came to UPF, wanting to express their frustrations about the crimes committed against them. We suggested that they see themselves not just as victims but as ambassadors of an interesting cultural heritage and that they should share it with the people here. After showing a film about their terrible experiences, they cooked for the guests and a dance group introduced their traditional type of dancing. We all were enriched by this experience, Mr. Haider said. Every nation and its people have so many stories and expressions of their culture which can be shared, and in doing so they enrich and bring people closer together.

