

UPF Europe and the Middle East ILC 2022: Session VII

Artan Kurti
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Tirana, Albania -- The seventh and final session of the Europe-Middle East International Leadership Conference 2022 was titled "Peace and Security in the Western Balkans: Towards the Integration in the European Union."

The session took place on August 5, 2022, in the UPF Peace Embassy.

Previous sessions were held in Berlin on July 26, in London on August 4, and in Larnaca, Cyprus, also on August 5.

An International Leadership Conference was

held in every region of the world in the summer of 2022, with the overall theme "Towards Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula: Building a Global Culture of Peace."

Session VII panelists assessed the impact that the Ukraine war and heightened East-West tensions would have on the Western Balkans. They offered recommendations and action steps toward peace and stability in the region. They also discussed whether the conflict would open new opportunities for integration into the European Union.

The session was moderated by **Dr. Saemira Gjipali Pino**, the chair of the Albanian chapter of UPF's International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP).

Dr. Eva Çipi, the chair of UPF-Albania, greeted the audience and introduced the panel. She then spoke about the background of UPF, its founders, and its main Ideals.

She expanded on the three main principles promoted by UPF: interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal values.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, the president of Albania (2002-2007), was not able to participate in person due to health issues. Instead, he sent a written speech which **Gani Rroshi**, the secretary general of UPF-Albania, read on the president's behalf.

In his speech Dr. Moisiu remarked on the current situation in Ukraine as well as the necessity for the European Union to take the necessary measures to not allow a similar occurrence to happen in the midst of the European continent, namely in the Balkan Peninsula.

"Nationalism ... should be fought in a better organized manner by the political leaders of the region," Dr. Moisiu wrote. "However, this can only happen if these leaders will be less focused on votes" and more responsible to work for stability.

Professor Dr. Nano Ružin, the ambassador of North Macedonia to NATO (2001-2008) as well as a UPF Ambassador for Peace, reminisced on the Balkan countries' Euro-Atlantic integration process.

"In 1989, when the Iron Curtain fell, a world order led by economic motives was established, freed from military conflicts and rivalries between the great powers," Professor Ružin said.

"It was an order in which economic gain and mutual protection were guaranteed through international law, the self-determination of peoples, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. ... In such an international order, it is impossible to believe in violence and interstate wars and invasions."

He closed his remarks with hope for the future: "In the Western Balkans, solidarity and cooperation are essential elements for improving trust and prosperity as well as for overcoming the crisis that arose from the war in Ukraine.

"That's why I look at the Western Balkans option with great hopes -- although without our brothers from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, the picture is not complete."

Professor Dr. Enver Hoxha, the deputy prime minister of Kosovo (2017-2019), remarked on the conflict in Ukraine as well as the parallels to the situation in the Balkans.

Not only are West-leaning countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo hampered in accessing international organizations by Russian and Chinese vetoes, he said, but also Serbia as a Russia-leaning country continues to stir the unsettled conflicts of the

1990s in an effort to advance its own expansionist agenda.

Dr. Hoxha said that the relationship between two countries is more important than the problems between them.

"A relationship leading to mutual recognition is more important than dealing with the problems," he said, "because when you have the philosophy and the vision of establishing a relationship of mutual recognition – and Kosovo will always be an independent country – then we can have different scenarios of solving problems, because such a relationship would also determine the way toward a resolution of conflicts."

Hon. Klajda Gjosha, the Albanian minister of European integration (2013-2017), touched on the crucial importance of the integration of the Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Peace and stability in the Balkans are in a direct correlation to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region as a whole, she said.

Ms. Gjosh said that Albania supports the establishment of regional stability, in which Serbia's recognition of Kosovo's independence is essential.

She said the time has come for Kosovo's citizens to feel equal with the rest of the Western Balkans.

"The time has come for Kosovo to gain membership into NATO, because the latest events in its conflict with Serbia have shown how unsure Kosovo and our whole region are."

Ms. Gjosh said that the only way to ensure peace and stability is for the Balkans to become part of Europe, which is of the highest interest of Albanians.

Adm. Dragan Samardžić, the former chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, said: "The long-term process of European integration of the Western Balkans leaves additional room for all those actors that want to destabilize the region and stop the process of democratization of our countries.

"Here I refer to Russia and organized criminal groups, which 'keep the sea rough' because they swim best in it. That is why the EU's active role and commitment to the Western Balkans is extremely important, because there is no doubt that Russia will know how to use any European weakness," Adm. Samardžić said.

"Just as the accession of Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro improved the security of our region, the accession of Finland and Sweden will make it safer, NATO stronger, and the Euro-Atlantic area more secure. Furthermore, it will contribute to better cooperation between NATO and the EU. Confirmation of NATO's open-door policy at the summit in Madrid may be one more reason for some countries of the Western Balkans to reconsider their security policy and finally take the right track."

Dr. Flora Brovina, the speaker of Kosovo's parliament (2014) and the chair of UPF-Kosovo, said that the peoples of the Western Balkans especially feel the suffering of Ukrainians because of the many unhealed wounds caused by the Yugoslavian wars.

"The same crimes against humanity, such as the raping of women, happened here too," she said.

"How much do we want peace, how much do we think that we may forgive just because of peace, though many people have disappeared?"

"When I said being able to forgive, I didn't mean being able to forget, because we cannot forget."

Dr. Brovina said, "For the sake of our children's security who never saw the war, and to ensure their future, we never indoctrinated them nor did we feed hate to them.

"Today Kosovo follows the path of development that is the path of the European countries, and we are a part of this family."

Before a ceremony appointing new Ambassadors for Peace, **Jacques Marion**, the co-chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, appeared in a recorded message to officially close the ILC.

He thanked all the participants and particularly former Albanian President Alfred Moisiu, who had helped to organize the ILC session in Tirana. Mr. Marion said it was significant that the ILC was concluding in the Tirana Peace Embassy, "which represents our hope, our expectation, that the Balkans can play an important role in overcoming conflict in Europe.

"Thank you again, and I sincerely wish you a summer of peace."