

UPF Albania hosts the Balkans Leadership Conference in Tirana

Melanie Komagata
November 21, 2021



Tirana, Albania - Six former heads of state and government, 120 Ambassadors for Peace, and UPF representatives from 25 nations attended a Balkans Leadership Conference.

UPF of Europe and the Middle East organized the conference jointly with the Podgorica Club, an organization founded in 2019 by former presidents of Southeast Europe.

The purpose of the conference was the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the two organizations.

Beginning at the Tirana International Hotel with a welcoming banquet on November 20 and continuing with two sessions on the morning of November 21, 2021, the conference concluded in the afternoon with the inauguration of the Balkans Peace Embassy, a building dedicated to promoting peace in the Balkans which also will serve as a regional UPF headquarters.

The building, whose construction started with a groundbreaking ceremony in October 2019 at the time of UPF's Southeast Europe Peace Summit in Tirana, was inaugurated in the presence of the mayor of Tirana and the six former heads of state and government of the Balkans.

The Balkans Leadership Conference



The first session's panel consisted of UPF leaders and members of the Podgorica Club, who discussed the topic "Cooperating for Peace and Development in the Western Balkans" before the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Cooperation.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, the president of Albania (2002-2007) and the chair of International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) Balkans, offered welcoming remarks. President Moisiu emphasized the importance of cooperation between the Balkan States, which recently have faced growing tensions. This cooperation is necessary to create a new path of peace and security in the region, a legacy he wishes to leave to the younger and future generations. He concluded by affirming, "The cooperation between the Podgorica

Club and UPF, as well as the opening of the embassy, will contribute to the process of reconciliation in the Balkans for lasting peace in the region."

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

The first keynote address was given by Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East, who described the will of the UPF founders to support peacebuilding around the world and especially in the Balkans. This can be ensured, he said, through understanding the interreligious, intercultural, and multiethnic context of the region, as Mother Moon affirmed at the Southeast Europe Peace Summit that was held in Tirana in 2019.

[Click here for the full intervention of Dr. Katsumi Otsuka at the Balkans Leadership Conference](#)

In his keynote address, H.E. Filip Vujanovi , the president of Montenegro (2003-2018) and president of the Podgorica Club, emphasized the importance of looking at the future instead of focusing on the tragic past of the region, in order for cooperation to take place through a common language of understanding. He expressed his gratitude for the signing of the Memorandum, a result of preparations and cooperation between the Podgorica Club and UPF over several years.

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The panel discussion ended with congratulatory remarks from two former Balkan leaders.



The panelists of the first session with UPF leaders

H.E. Stepan Mesi , the president of Croatia (2000-2010) and a member of the Podgorica Club, encouraged all states to speak the same language and work together to create a peaceful Balkan region without division. President Mesi said that the new Peace Embassy is sending a message of hope and peace.

[Click here for the full intervention of H.E. Stepan Mesi at the Balkans Leadership Conference](#)

H.E. Agim eku, the prime minister of Kosovo (2006-2008), emphasized the responsibility and duties of officials and statesmen, even after their mandate, and the importance of taking responsibility for the region, rather than waiting for the European Union and other nations to solve the problems of the Balkans.

[Click here for the full intervention of H.E. Agim eku at the Balkans Leadership Conference](#)

H.E. Nataša Mi i , the president of Serbia (2002-2004), who could not be present, sent a congratulatory message that was read aloud. In her message she highlighted the importance of UPF and the Podgorica Club coming together in this way to work for peace and unity among all the nations of the Western Balkans, especially given the current worrying situation in the region. She said she looks forward to playing a role in the peace activities of both organizations in the future.

[Click here for the content of the letter of H.E. Nataša Mi i on the occasion of the Balkans Leadership Conference](#)

The first session ended with the signature of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Podgorica Club and UPF. H.E. Filip Vujanovi and Dr. Katsumi Otsuka represented their respective organizations in signing the document.

The second session focused on the topic of "Balkans Peace Initiative and Think Tank 2022" and was moderated by Dr. Saemira Pino, former deputy minister of education in Albania.

H.E. Mladen Ivani , the president of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015-2017) and a member of the Podgorica Club, explained his nation's three-member presidency, who must cooperate and find a consensus to make political decisions. On that note, he expressed the importance of the world's major powers cooperating and working together in this same manner to overcome tensions.



Dr. Katsumi Otsuka (left) and H.E. Filip Vujanovi sign the Memorandum of Cooperation.



Jacques Marion, the co-chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East, reviewed the background and philosophy of UPF activities in Albania and the Balkans, which led to the inauguration of the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) in 2019 during the Southeast Europe Peace Summit, and to establishing the Memorandum of Cooperation this year between UPF and the Podgorica Club. He also explained about UPF's Think Tank 2022 project for the reunification of Korea and emphasized the significance of the Peace Embassy in opening a new level of activities for UPF in the Balkans.

Hon. Muamer Bacevac, a member of Parliament in Serbia, emphasized the importance of overcoming prejudice, which gives birth to anger and conflict. Prejudice can be replaced with tolerance, which is the respect and appreciation of all people despite differences in speech, values, culture, and other domains, he said. Practicing tolerance can allow understanding and solidarity. He ended his speech with a message of hope that after the pandemic, a new golden era for care and cooperation will begin.



The panelists of the second session

Dr. Shekerinka Ivanovska, a professor at the International Slavic University in North Macedonia, cited statistics of the Global Peace Index showing that \$1 invested in peacekeeping can result in a reduction of

\$16 used in military conflict. She expressed her support for the signing of the Memorandum and opening of the Peace Embassy, as well as the need for developing peace education, and said that think tanks can be a sustainable way to bring about understanding and therefore peace.

Hon. Hydajet Hyseni, a member of Parliament in Kosovo, cited Dr. Moon who said that people cannot be divided, and so it is for their soul. On that note he spoke of the importance of the integration of the nation, and of the hope for the future through the young population. He expressed his gratitude for the investment of UPF for peace and spoke of the need for purity and justice in establishing peace in the region.

Hon. Lavdrim Krashi, a member of Parliament in Albania, said that Mother Teresa, who was born Albanian, taught that one should first be at peace with oneself, then create peace within the family, and then in the neighborhood, the nation, the region, and the world. He concluded with a quote of Winston Churchill: "If the human race wishes to have a prolonged and indefinite period of material prosperity, they have only got to behave in a peaceful and helpful way toward one another."



Inauguration of the Balkans Peace Embassy

The third part of the program was the inauguration of the Peace Embassy for the Balkan region. The groundbreaking ceremony took place in October 2019, and the building was completed in November 2021.

The participating organizations were Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and its affiliated organizations Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), and International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP), together with the city of Tirana as well as the Avatelier architecture studio and the GBK construction company.

Approximately 300 people attended the inauguration, which was widely covered by the region's newspapers, television, and social media.



The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Manjola Vasmatics, the president of FFWPU-Albania, moderated the ceremony. She invited Sheh Hysen Hormova, the head of the Halveti Order of Islam, Albania, who expressed words of hope for interreligious harmony that can result from the Peace Embassy.

Congratulatory remarks were offered by the former president of Albania, H.E. Alfred Moisiu, as well as Erion Veliaj, the mayor of Tirana; Dr. Eva Çipi, the chair of UPF-Albania; and Prof. Assoc. Armand Vokshi, the architect of the Peace Embassy. Each of the speakers offered messages of hope and peace and emphasized the major role of the Peace Embassy.



The mayor of Tirana, Mr. Veliaj, said that the Peace Embassy is probably the most important embassy in the city. As Tirana has been selected as the European Youth Capital for 2022, he said he hopes that the embassy will become a place of networking for young people to create projects that will never allow war and conflicts to occur, but only peace.

The architect Mr. Vokshi described the building as a "House of Peace" built in a strategic location in the embassy district, with the white color symbolizing the purity of peace and the red color its fragility. The building will be a space for peaceful exchanges for experts as well as young people, and the ground floors will be used for offices and conference rooms, he said.



After the ribbon cutting ceremony which officially opened the Peace Embassy, the program continued inside the building in the main auditorium.

A message sent by UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who supported the establishment of the embassy, was read by Dr. Michael Balcomb, the president of FFWPU Europe and the Middle East.

In her message Dr. Moon expressed her conviction that the Balkan nations are destined to become a model of peace and cooperation for the whole world. "Peace is never an easy task, however, because it always means that we must live for the sake of others more than we live for our own selves," she wrote. Her message concluded with her lifelong goal to see "all the nations of the world join together in loving cooperation, so that we may at last become true brothers and sisters, one family under God."

Carolyn Handschin, president of WFWP Europe, vice president of WFWP International, and president of the Committee on the Status of Women at the UN in Geneva, expressed her hope for peace through the Peace Embassy, and for great actions and projects that can be put into place in this building, especially by women and youth.

The inauguration ended with cheers of hope for the future of the Balkans and of the Peace Embassy led by Dr. Katsumi Otsuka.



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

Written by H.E. Alfred Moisiu, president of Albania (2002-2007) and chair of the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) Balkans



21 November 2021



Honorable Presidents and other dignitaries, members of the Podgorica Club!

Honorable members of parliament & representatives from 20 countries of Europe & the Balkans,

Distinguished Ambassadors for Peace from all over Albania and other Albanian-speaking countries; brothers and sisters,

As the Chairman of the International Summit Council for Peace in the Balkans, it is a special honor and pleasure for me to welcome you to this very important event held on the occasion of the Inauguration of the Balkans Peace Embassy. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude, but also that of all the Ambassadors for Peace, to Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of our Federation, for the precious gift she has granted us by investing in the construction of the Peace Embassy. I also take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Moon again for the donation of 100 thousand dollars to the Albanian government after the earthquake of 2019, following the communication I had with its representatives in Europe.

Given the successful cooperation between the Universal Peace Federation and the Podgorica Club over the past two years, beginning with the Southeast Europe Peace Summit held in Tirana in October 2019; after intensive discussions, it was agreed that today The Signing Ceremony of the Cooperation Agreement between the Podgorica Club and the Universal Peace Federation would be officially held. I am confident that this cooperation will play an important role in promoting peace and security in our Balkan region in particular, but also beyond it.

I want to express my gratitude and thanks to my friend, President Vujanovic, and to the Members of the Podgorica Club, who are here with us today.

Although two decades have passed since the meaningless wars in the Balkans, we still face great challenges that need to be overcome, which require courageous, responsible leadership and a strong will to take responsibility for the mistakes and tragedies of the past, and to open new paths for the future.

As we all know, the aspiration of all the countries of the Western Balkans is integration into the European Union, and I have stated before that the European Union must absolutely open negotiations with these countries. We are aware that, in addition to the homework and the problems that each country has within itself, we are lacking adequate cooperation in the region, and recently tensions have been growing. I want to emphasize once again that the leaders of the Western Balkans need to be aware of the mistakes of the past and take responsibility for them, as nations and as leaders, by showing courageous and visionary leadership. This is the only way to ensure that future generations will not inherit our failures.

Our responsibility is manifold:

1. To our young people and future generations, we must leave behind a legacy of peace, providing them with a better future, within the European family. We must do our best to keep alive for them the hope for the future in their countries, because the potential is huge, and we must stop their displacement toward the West, which is causing depopulation.
2. We must build the future of our region based on family values, which are an important part of our culture in the

- Balkans. The family is given special importance in all the activities of the Universal Peace Federation, and I think this is very relevant. Without strong and stable families, there can be no stable societies and nations.
3. We need to work even harder to overcome the challenges that come as a result of the ethnic and religious conflicts that have occurred in our region and have had a significant impact on the history of the Balkans, and that apparently still continue to affect the mentality of our peoples.

I am confident that the cooperation between the Podgorica Club and the Universal Peace Federation, as well as the opening of the Peace Embassy will contribute to advancing the process of reconciliation between the peoples of the Balkans and building lasting peace in our region.

Finally, I hope that the inspiration you will receive during this conference, through the speakers’ messages, discussions and exchange of experiences with each other, will enable you to understand that we belong to each other and that together we are responsible for the future of our children and the generations to come.

Thank you!

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- Intervention of H.E. Živko Budimir
- Intervention of Hon. Prof. Dr Vasilika Hysi



Intervention of Dr. Katsumi Otsuka at the Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East

📅 21 November 2021



Excellencies, respected members of the Podgorica Club, parliamentarians, Ambassadors for Peace, and UPF leaders!

Representing the Universal Peace Federation of Europe and the Middle East, I want to express my sincere gratitude to you for participating in the "Balkan Leadership Conference 2021" and the "Signing Ceremony" in this historic city of Tirana. I am very happy that the partnership building event between the Podgorica Club and UPF has been realized today after the long postponement of one year and half due to the Covid 19 epidemic.

Taking this opportunity, let me express my deepest condolences to the victims of Covid 19 in the Balkan nations. I also want to express my greatest respect to the Corona fighters who have been working tirelessly day and night to overcome this global disaster.

This signing event was organized to promote the partnership between the *Podgorica Club*, which was founded by the esteemed political leaders of the West Balkans, and *UPF Europe and Middle East*. It is our greatest happiness and honor to cooperate with the *Podgorica Club*. This cooperation, I am sure, will work well to ensure the promotion of peace building in the region.

As you know, the Universal Peace Federation was founded in 2005 by the late Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon with the vision to organize a Global Council of leaders from many fields. UPF was also designed as an organization to support the peace-building work of the United Nations, and its fundamental framework is based upon the understanding of *inter-religious, inter-national, and inter-cultural cooperation*.

Recently, UPF International has organized various events commemorating our founders' visit to Pyongyang, North Korea in December 1991. They visited North Korea risking their lives, in order to relieve the extreme tension between North and South Korea and they were able to hold peace talks with North Korean president Kim Il Sung.

Many high-level political leaders, such as the former President of the USA and the former Prime Minister of Japan, have spoken at our recent events and expressed their support for UPF's investment for peace on the Korean Peninsula. UPF has also organized the global Think Tank 2022 with eminent leaders of various fields.

The geographical location of the Balkan Peninsula as the crossroad of civilizations has shown us its important role as a key location for achieving sustainable peace, not only in the region, but also in Europe. Therefore, Mother Moon gave the blessing to the Balkan nations, expressing her greatest concern and expectation to the Balkan leaders as peace makers. She warmly supported the construction of the Peace Embassy which will be opened today.

I would like to end my speech here, expressing deep appreciation again to all of you for attending this ceremony and conference. I also humbly wish to ask your continued support for the cooperative work between the Podgorica Club and UPF. Finally, I would like to share one very nice Albanian proverb.

Fillimi i mbarë është gjysma e punës. "A good start is a half done."

Thank you very much for your attention.



Intervention of H.E. Filip Vujanović at the Balkans Leadership Conference

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

 21 November 2021



Expressing my utmost gratitude to the Universal Peace Federation, I would like to offer by congratulations on the opening of the Balkans Peace Embassy, which will lastingly promote the value of peace and its importance as a precondition for stability and prosperity.

The Universal Peace Federation and Podgorica Club are dedicated to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. They see cooperation and respect for differences as a foundation for lasting co-existence. These values and boundaries are the exact reason for maintaining a partnership between the Podgorica Club and UPF.

This cooperation started with the individual participation of the members of the Podgorica Club in the numerous and valuables activities organized by UPF. It continued with the involvement of the Podgorica Club in the South East Europe Peace Summit in October 2019 and in UPF's World Summit 2020 in February in Seoul. This collaboration was also active during the Covid-19 Pandemic when UPF organized a video conference about the Balkan and Korean Peninsulas in March of this year.

Today's signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Podgorica Club and UPF is, without a doubt, a consequence of our lasting, successful cooperation and the necessity to refresh and diversify our actions.

This is an excellent opportunity for me to express my utmost respect and gratitude to the leadership of UPF's branch in Europe and the Middle East, provided by Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Mr. Jacques Marion, Dr. Michael Balcomb, as well as Mr. Gani Rroshi, who helped immensely in defining and reaching the deal to sign the Memorandum of Cooperation.

I want to especially thank the former President of Albania, Mr. Alfred Moisiu, who is currently the Chairman of the ISCP Balkans and one of the founders of the Podgorica Club. Ever since he was the active President of Albania, Mr. Moisiu has recognized UPF's values.

I would also like to express my respect and gratitude to the other members of the Podgorica Club, who are here with us today – former President of Albania, Mr. Rexhep Meidani, a respected Albanian academic. Then, to Former Croatian President Mr. Stjepan “Stipe” Mesic, who has tremendous experience serving his country and has participated in UPF's activities for many years. Finally, to the former member of the Presidency and the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Mladen Ivanic, a respected university professor who has been promoting the values of dialogue and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina for many years. I also express my respect to Mr. Ruzdija Tuzovic, the Podgorica Club's Secretary-General.

Convinced of the successful cooperation between the Universal Peace Federation and the Podgorica club, I express my assurances of the highest consideration.



Intervention of H.E. Stepan Mesić at the Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Stepan Mesić, president of Croatia (2000-2010) and a member of the Podgorica Club

21 November 2021

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, respected friends,

Every step that leads Southeast Europe towards peace is welcome. Any connection like this one that the Podgorica club has with the Universal Peace Federation is welcome.

Any establishment of an institution that paves the way for peace, security, and stability in this area is more than good.

The Peace Embassy is an ambitious project whose name incorporates both desire and hope. But it is also something else: it is imperative, because, after all that the nations of this region have gone through in their turbulent and bloody past, after all the wars and conflicts, and least of all in the function of their own interests, peace is what we all need. And not peace as a period between wars, but peace as a permanent state to which both consciousness and political will shall lead.

I repeat - consciousness and political will. Awareness of the need for lasting peace, built on the principles of complete equality, mutual respect, satisfying common interests and non-interference in the internal affairs of others, we must first develop this awareness in all nations. And that means we must wage a resolute fight against all those who spread intolerance and xenophobia, who preach hatred and want to turn nations into captives of a falsified past.

I am fully aware that this struggle will be neither easy, nor simple, nor short. The seeds of evil have been sown and diligently watered for decades. And to eradicate it will take effort and time. But it will also need political will. The ruling political parties, some of which owe their power and survival almost exclusively to the homogenization of their own peoples by presenting 'these others' as age-old enemies, and at the same time less valuable, will have to give up their model of governance, based on the fear of others.

I say, they will have to!

Unfortunately, the situation in the world is not in our favor. After the end of the Cold War and the confrontation of the different blocs, when we hoped that a new chapter in international relations had opened, we witnessed the unfounded triumphalism of one side, the roughest trampling of the basic principles on which international relations are based, we witnessed an era of unilateral actions, often armed, the marginalization of the United Nations and finally the beginning of something that is not without reason called the new cold war.

All this was followed by our falling into the shadow of the great world Non-Aligned Movement, which is to be thanked for the fact that the world at the time of the blocs' division did not move from the phase of the Cold War to that of open conflict. The non-aligned nations, though, still exist, but on the world stage, with the exception of the United Nations General Assembly, they are barely present or visible.

The confrontation between the West, in fact between the United States and Russia, was followed by the confrontation of the same group of countries with China. The European Union is consistent in its inability to speak the same language and with one voice when it comes to the pressing problems of today. The arms race has resumed, the differences between developing and developed countries are widening, the global agreement on combating climate change, as we were supposed to reach it, was impossible to achieve, to a pandemic that is a global threat, the world has failed to respond in a coordinated and joint action.



I had to list all this, at least briefly, to make it clear why I say that world conditions are not in our favor to direct the Balkans, or Southeast Europe, call it as you wish, towards a path of peace, cooperation, mutual understanding and trust. Which, it is almost superfluous to say, implies the inclusion of all countries in the region in the European Union, regardless of all its shortcomings. That is exactly what we need.

Without that, without a key deviation from the current situation, there is no future for this region. When I say that, I refer to the relations between my country Croatia and Serbia, the attitude of both Croatia and Serbia towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, the internal situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the role of the international factors in that. Moreover, in some neighboring larger countries, we hear voices that irresistibly lead to the conclusion that the appetites there, the old appetites for parts of the territory of certain counties that grew up on the territory of Yugoslavia, have not been extinguished.

Does that mean I'm a pessimist, that I think we should give up? Indeed not, quite the opposite. The adverse conditions in the international environment and circumstances in the countries of this area can and must lead us to even more energetic, clearer, and even more decisive moves whose goal is only one - peace!

I dare say that in that struggle for peace, because it is a struggle, a special role can be played by people who are no longer active on the political scene, people who do not act under the pressure of knowing that elections are coming, which imposes the need to calculate and compromise with their own beliefs. But such people are not and will not be enough. We must rely on non-governmental organizations, on the civil sector, on institutions like the Universal Peace Federation, on all those who are not motivated by a desire for profit and personal gain in their activities.

We must break down the framework of the dominant myths about the free market as a mechanism that solves all problems, about neoliberal capitalism as a system set for all times, a system that is not and cannot be better. We must also break through the framework of the myth of the Western type of democracy as the best and suitable to impose it, if necessary by force, on nations and states that have chosen their own, different path, in accordance with their needs and specifics. And we must, extremely energetically and without the slightest hesitation, oppose historical revisionism.

We must fight for the "citizenship right" for indisputable facts, whether one likes it or not, and we must end the hypocritical call for freedom of speech and expression as a cover to promote the ideas and worldviews that brought persecution, suffering and death to tens of millions of people in the 20th century, both in camps and on fronts.

We must suppress the interpretation to which some incline out of calculation, and some out of ignorance and misunderstanding, that democracy is nothing but anarchy, that by invoking the right to choose can jeopardize the general interest of all, with impunity. This is because that majority, which unfortunately are often silent, think of both themselves and others, while those who wave their right to choose think only of themselves.

I would say they don't really think at all. How else can we characterize all those who consider it their right to ignore, or even deny notorious facts, to spread lies, literally, to endanger the lives of others? This can only be done by someone who does not think at all.

So, the burden that lies on our shoulders is huge and difficult. Its disintegration will be contrary to the interests of many powerful people, but it is in the interest of the people.

The task of creating the preconditions for lasting peace, security and stability in the Balkans will certainly not be achieved by our generation, I mean everyone over the age of 50. But it's up to us to point the way, to direct young people on that path toward the right goals and right values. It's up to us to start the fight, or to continue it, and it is up to the young to take over from us. And in doing so, not to let us or ourselves down.

Meetings like today, creating bonds of cooperation, establishing institutions such as the Peace Embassy, are all small but necessary steps in a united struggle to turn the Balkans into a comfortable place to live; into a place where nations will not be held hostage to historical myths and lies about the past, into a place where people will again, because they seem to have forgotten, look at each other as people and not as members of this or that nation, this or that religion.

To put it in one sentence: we need a Balkans tailored to man. And in our efforts to create such a Balkans, we must not give up. I came here today to be able to say that.

Thank you for your kind attention!

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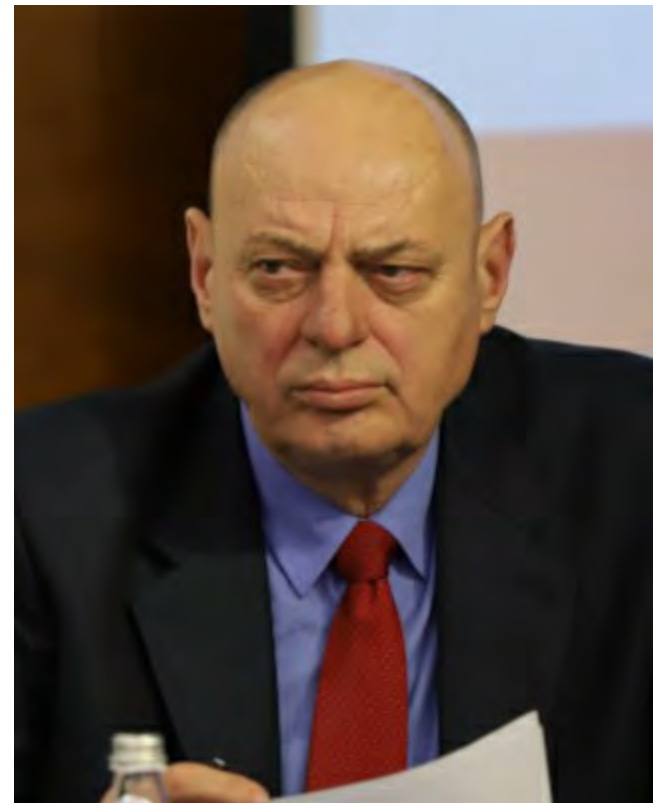
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Intervention of H.E. Agim Çeku at the Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Agim Çeku, the prime minister of Kosovo (2006-2008)

21 November 2021



Dear Excellencies, Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends.

Our duty is not finished.

We are the generation that fought the difficult battles. We are the generation that agreed the difficult peace agreements. We have democratically handed power over to a new generation.

Like many of you, I know the suffering and tragedy of war. Like many of you, I know the challenges of compromise and reconciliation. I had to make difficult compromises in the summer of 1999. I had to make very difficult compromises in 2007 and 2008. I did my duty, because I knew it was best for my children and my people. I made the compromises, I worked hard for reconciliation. Many of you, my friends and colleagues here, have the same experience.

Our duty is not finished. The work is not finished. Our region is not finished.

We have finished the fighting. We have finished redrawing the map. We have finished the creation of new countries.

But we have not finished building a stable, sustainable democracy. Some people in our countries expect the rewards of freedom and capitalism before they have fulfilled their responsibilities. We have all seen the problems of corruption; the problems of lack of investment in education; the problems of courtrooms which our citizens do not trust. In too many places, we have 21st century government offices and 19th century school buildings.

And we have not finished building a cooperative region. We know what the region looks like, but we have not made it work; we have not learned to work together. The international community has lost interest. The European Union is looking inwards. Other actors intervene in our region only for their own interests, or to stir up trouble between us.

We cannot wait for the foreigners. The longer we wait for someone else to solve our problems, the longer we will wait for EU membership.

We must be more than consumers of other people's diplomacy and foreign policy. We must be more than beggars of security. Yes, most of us are committed to EU membership. Yes, I am proud of everything I did as Minister and Prime Minister to strengthen my country's alliance with NATO. But if we are passive, we will remain the subjects of foreign empires and foreign rivalries, as we were a century ago.

It is up to us to develop strong economic co-operation, including trade and tourism and foreign direct investment, that are not restricted by borders. It is up to us to develop an integrated transport network across the region. It is up to us to develop cross-border relationships between schools and sports teams. It is up to us to define what security means in our region, and how we will achieve security together. It is up to us to show that the possibilities of peace are stronger than the memories of war.

We are all senior leaders who have left our rivalries behind us. So, it is up to us to offer an example of looking forwards, an example of co-operation. Our duty is not yet finished. But we all know that together we can finish it.

Letter of H.E. Nataša Mičić on the occasion of the Balkans Leadership Conference

Written by H.E. Nataša Mičić, President of the Serbian National Assembly (2001-2004), Acting President of Serbia (2002-2004)



21 November 2021

Dear President Moisiu,

Dear President Vujanović,

Dear fellow former heads of state and government,

Dear Universal Peace Federation Europe & The Middle East Co-Chairs Dr Otsuka and Monsieur Marion,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very sorry that due to COVID-19-related reasons, I am unable to be with you today for the ceremony surrounding the signature of the memorandum of cooperation between the Podgorica Club and Universal Peace Federation, Europe and the Middle East.

I have a high regard for both signatory organizations and the work that they do and indeed have been involved in the work of both of them myself. I also have a deep sense of the value and importance of two such organizations coming together in this way to work for peace and unity among all the people of the Western Balkans. There is so much of such work to be done and I have no doubt that the collaboration between them will bring lasting peace in the region closer in significant ways. Indeed, due to the current worrying situation in the Balkans, the memorandum of cooperation is not only important, but very timely. It comes into effect just when it is most needed.

I look forward very much to playing a role in supporting the peace activities of both organizations in the future and truly wish all of their joint endeavors well.

Finally, I hope that your meeting there in Tirana goes well and that it proves to be a happy and rewarding occasion for you all.

Yours, very truly,

Natasa Mičić



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- Intervention of H.E. Nataša Mičić, President (2002 - 2004), Serbia, in the Peace Talks Webinar on 30-7-2020.
- Peace Council Established in Presheva, South Serbia
- Balkans Peace Initiative Consultation: Toward Lasting Peace in the Balkans
- UPF, Balkan Leaders Agree to Work Together
- Intervention of H.E. Alfred Moisiu at the Balkans Leadership Conference