

UPF Bratislava, Slovakia: Renowned Slovakian Politician's Path to End War

Barbara Grabner
October 21, 2024



Bratislava, Slovakia – How can we end war in Europe? To address this frequently asked question, UPF-Slovakia hosted an event in the Bratislava Peace Embassy on October 21, 2024. The renowned guest speaker was **Dr. Ján Figel'**, former EU commissioner and the first EU special envoy for religious freedom.



The anthem of the European Union, the famous Ode to Joy from Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, was played as a capacity audience waited eagerly to hear this very experienced speaker.

Dr. Figel' began by repeating Pope Francis' appeal to the United Nations, "brotherhood is the route to peace." He outlined the importance of nurturing this relationship, particularly in light of the challenges

faced in Ukraine and elsewhere.



“We need to show that we are brothers in faith and in humanity,” said Dr. Figel’, stressing the great need for recommitment to the values and vision of lasting peace based on European brotherhood, as championed by the great French politician Robert Schuman. His talk was not quite as expected; being used to media reports and commentaries which offer no substantial solutions, many of the listeners were moved that he had given thought to conflict causes and solutions.



Dr. Figel’, a renowned Christian Democrat politician and very active in many fields, suggested bringing together the economic interests of the United States and Russia by establishing a common market in energy, minerals and information technology. “If this cooperation opens to other countries, a Northern Commonwealth could emerge from Alaska to Kamchatka, through Europe and Central Asia. The positive impact of such gradual and sensible cooperation would be not only new stability and prosperity, but also global development.” He expressed his conviction that peace in Europe is a precondition for stability and prosperity.

Since spring 2024, Dr. Figel’ has chaired an initiative encouraging dialogue and cooperation between the major nuclear powers, the United States, the Russian Federation, and the European Union. Talks take place in the Vatican, which maintains a neutral and impartial position.

Related commentary by Dr. Ján Figel’ in The Washington Times may be found here:
www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/jul/11/for-peace-we-need-schuman-and-marshall-plan-20/



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COMMENTARY

By Jan Figel - Thursday, July 11, 2024

OPINION:

Three wars in Europe in the 20th century escalated into tragic and long global conflicts: World War I, World War II and the Cold War. Danger of a similar escalation of the conflict in the east of Europe still exists and is growing.

Russia is an aggressor violating valid international law. In the last 30 years, Eastern Europe has become situated in the flow of unsolved problems. Russia is moving closer to another global power — China. European countries and the United States stay united, but they pay a high war price as well.

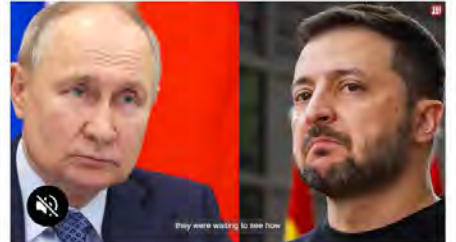
After more than two years since Russia's invasion and war in Ukraine, the bloody toll of losses and rate of devastation are steadily growing. The damage is immeasurable — human, moral, cultural, economic. The fatigue and apathy of the population are visible. More than ever, one can hear appeals for a complex, just and sustainable peace. On the other side, nexus of a great war is getting closer. Its probability is growing.

Doing nothing or current developments would get us into a continuity with the evils of the 20th century. The impact of detrimental ideologies is growing. Acting in the "spirit of brotherhood" is a personal duty of each of us, especially in time of the ongoing

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fratricidal war. We are all invited to this obligation by Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948.

In the same spirit, an unprecedented peace plan was offered in 1950 to belligerent nations of Germany, Italy and other European countries by then-French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman. Leaders such as Schuman, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and French diplomat Jean Monnet were statesmen with reason and faith, servants of justice for all, defenders of human dignity and promoters of the common good.

The outcome of their practical solidarity after the Second World War was more than armistice, appeasement and de-escalation — it has been a fair, realistic and attractive community of equals building renewal and gradual prosperity for all. Community was based on reconciliation, law of treaties and common institutions.

The original Schuman Plan was about making a new war in united Europe impossible. This project became a reality for the participating countries, existing for over 70 years. Today we need an analogical and different plan to stop war in Europe and prevent any war in the future through reasonable policy and mutual cooperation. Turning confrontation into cooperation is in the interest of nations and their development. Leaders come and go, but nations remain. With confrontation, third parties gain and grow in importance.

The cooperation of the East and West, of Moscow and Washington, has been a precondition and a basis for of victory over Nazism and fascism in Europe. Equally, the demise of communism and the fall of the Iron Curtain was achieved by nonviolent means, including dialogue between the West and East, between Washington and Moscow. Velvet victory over the cruel and violent communism has been a fruit of that understanding and cooperation.

Today, I have the honor to chair a private initiative to establish a new dialogue among representatives from the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union that draws from those historical events and experiences. A change of paradigm may not only overcome decades of confrontation, but also create the conditions to establish long-term peace in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Mutually beneficial cooperation can give rise to establishment of a large community from Anchorage, Alaska, to Vladivostok and Kamchatka in Russia through Central Asia and Europe. War in such a community may become impossible and unimaginable, as it was with the successful EU story since 1950. Such a large zone of security, cooperation and prosperity in the Northern Hemisphere would represent an unprecedented and unparalleled force for peace and stability in the world.

I am deeply convinced, that we need to work with the like-minded in Europe, the U.S. and Asia on Schuman and Marshall Plans 2.0. A common “West-East house” shall be built by invitation of nations from the West and East to a shared security architecture with shared ownership.

Such a joint invitation must include reconstruction of destroyed territories, especially in Ukraine, and design system of stability and subsequent prosperity. Discreet surveys in the various centers of power show encouraging reactions. Vision of an early peace and reconciliation including transitional justice must be connected to a sound international architecture guaranteeing security for all. A community of practical solidarity may stem from a common market with energy, natural resources, information technology and intellectual property (like the European Coal and Steel Community since 1950).

Shared security should be offered and guaranteed to all states of NATO and the former Soviet Union. As Europe’s founders did, roots of conflict must be eliminated, and prevention for the future lies in sharing resources and security.

Together with Adenauer, rightly say that a “united Europe was a dream of few, a desire of many and became a necessity for all.” Innovation by him is not coming from new ideas, but from ability to see old ideas in a new light. The Schuman Plan from 1950 was an unprecedented political innovation. For many Europeans it was a utopia, for others a provocation. Some in France considered it a betrayal. This great and timely innovation supported by firm commitment of mature national leaders proved a real and credible road to a peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe.

Today we must be reminded again and equally, that peace is needed and beneficial, and that peace, security and prosperity for all is possible. Peace requires courage, perseverance and constructive effort. I am convinced that such creative and growing effort of the like-minded people will prevail the near future over the forces of conflict,

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violence and war. The sooner, the better.

• *Jan Figel' is a former deputy prime minister of Slovakia, led Slovakia's accession negotiations to the European Union and preparation for NATO membership, has held the European Union commissioner mandate, was special envoy for freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, is the founder of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology and a member of the Clementy Foundation's advisory board (www.janfigel.sk).*

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