

Report on the IAPP Inaugural Conference in Pristina, Kosovo September 23rd – 24th, 2017 - Gani Rroshi

On September 23-24, 2017, the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) was launched in the Balkans at a European Leadership Conference held in Pristina, Kosovo, sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation. The main event was held in a hall at the Kosovo Parliament Building.



On the theme of “Culture and Peace in the Balkans: The Role of Parliamentarians”, the conference was attended by highly respected leaders in the Balkans: former President Moisiu of Albania, former President Mesic of Croatia, former President Sejdu of Kosovo, Macedonian Speaker of the Parliament Talat Xhaferi, and by over 100 participants including 20 parliamentarians and former parliamentarians, scholars and NGO leaders.

On September 23 morning, the UPF delegation was welcomed by the new Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj at his office. The Prime Minister shared about his efforts for peace and reconciliation in Kosovo, and the discussion went on about the crisis on the Korean peninsula and the UPF’s involvement with peacebuilding in that region. A luncheon was then offered by the President of the Kosovo Parliament Kadri Veseli for the former Balkan presidents and the UPF delegation led by UPF Chairman Dr Thomas Walsh, at a traditional restaurant in Pristina.



In the afternoon, in a beautiful hall at the Kosovo Parliament, the conference began with a session on the theme “A Shared Cultural Heritage, a Common Base for Peace and Stability in the Balkans”. The moderator was Mr. Jack Corley, chairman of the Family Federation for World Peace (FFWPU) in Eurasia. Dr Thomas Walsh gave the opening remarks, describing the recent work of UPF and the launch of the IAPP throughout the world, then gave the podium to the three former Balkan presidents.



Mr. Jack Corley

President Alfred Moisiu from Albania reflected on Balkan history, called on Balkan people to select leaders of integrity and asked for restraint from the Serbian leadership in relation to Kosovo.

President Fatmir Sejdiu of Kosovo said that considering the real value of Kosovo's cultural heritage is the way to foster cooperation and sustainable peace in the region – that he'd rather see culture in politics than politics without culture. President Mesic, who was the last president of the Republic of Yugoslavia and served two terms as president of Croatia, shared with the wisdom of experience that security and stability in Europe will not come through guns and armies, but through the equal treatment of nations, dialogue and communication, and non-interference in internal matters.



H. T. Alfred Moisiu



H. T. Fatmir Sejdiu



H. T. Stjepan Mesić

The two final speakers represented Russia and Europe. Dr Vladimir Petrovsky, an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), expressed that the values and objectives of IAPP were the most adequate to find a common base between the political perspectives from his country's and Kosovo's political leadership regarding the Balkans. Dr Walther Lichem, an Austrian Diplomat, former Director of the Department of International Organizations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry, concluded by discussing the importance of a societal approach to nation building and the need to assess the evolving nature of one's social identity.



Dr. Thomas Walsh



Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky



Dr. Walther Lichem

The second session featured a distinguished panel of current and former Parliament leaders who spoke on the topic “Inter-parliamentary Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation: The Role of Parliamentarians”. The moderator, Jacques Marion, Vice President of UPF Europe, invited participants to watch a video describing the launch of IAPP throughout the world in 2016 and at the World Summit 2017 in Korea. Then Dr Katsumi Otsuka, President of UPF for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, introduced briefly the life and vision of the UPF Founders and some of the practical projects which they initiated around the world, such as the Japan-Korea Undersea Tunnel.



Mr. Jacques Marion



Dr. Katsumi Otsuka



Hon. Jakup Krasniqi

Hon. Jakup Krasniqi, former President of the Assembly and Acting President of Kosovo, spoke of the destiny of his country as a member of the European Union, and called on parliamentarians to develop a new spirit and establish new partnerships. Hon. Talat Xhaferi, the current Speaker of the Macedonian Parliament, who had just arrived from the Macedonian capital, expressed optimism for the new political era in his country, spoke of the need to focus on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, and underlined the importance of bilateral and multilateral parliamentary diplomacy to tackle challenges and not repeat mistakes of the past.



Hon. Talat Xhaferi



Prof. Anto Domazet



Hon. Slobodan Petrović

Prof. Anto Domazet, a former Minister of Finance and Member of Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, gave an overview of the current economic and political factors for regional cooperation among Balkan nations. Describing the constraints limiting their economic development, he concluded on the challenge of adopting a market system without increasing inequalities. Hon. Slobodan Petrović, a recently re-elected parliamentarian and former Vice President of the Assembly of Kosovo - the only one among 10 Serbian minority parliamentarians to willingly cooperate with the Kosovo government - emphasized the need for integrity in this difficult political climate, and for reconciliation between the Albanian and Serbian communities and other minorities in Kosovo.

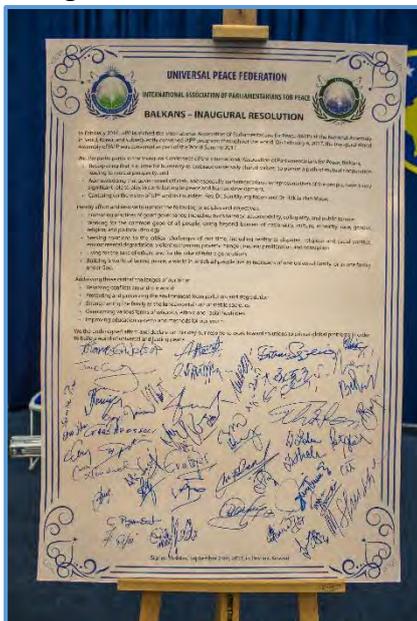
The last speaker, Dr Dashamir Shehi, a Member of Parliament and former Minister of Labor from Albania, gave a passionate speech suggesting that South-East Balkan nations that do not belong to the European Union create their own market system and unite their borders, energy system, telecommunications, etc.



Dr. Dashamir Shehi



At the end of the session, the title of Ambassador for Peace was bestowed by Dr Thomas Walsh and Dr Katsumi Otsuka upon Croatian President Mesic and Macedonian Speaker Xhaferi. The IAPP resolution was then read by the moderator, and a commemorative photo was taken with the panel and main leaders in the hall to celebrate the launch of IAPP in the Balkans, after which everyone signed the IAPP Resolution displayed onstage.



All participants were then invited for dinner and a cultural performance. Mrs. Hatixhe Hoxha, the Chairwoman of UPF Kosovo and Conference host, greeted the audience and spoke about her engagement as a woman leader in politics; then Hon. Gaqo Apostoli, the UPF Chair in Albania, offered to sing a Beatles song, and a young Japanese opera singer charmed everyone with a powerful rendition of Puccini's "O mio babbino caro". The evening ended with traditional songs in Croatian and Albanian language by a well-known Kosovo artist, a blind man, who delighted the audience and brought to the stage President Mesic, President Moisiu and Speaker Xhaferi for a heartfelt sing along.



Mrs. Hatixhe Hoxha



Hon. Gaqo Apostoli



Mrs. Kazumi Kawakubo



Mr. Mentor Mripa

On December 24, the conference began with a session on “Strengthening the Family, Core of the Balkans’ Cultural Heritage”, moderated by Mr. Giuseppe Cali, president of the Family Federation for World Peace in Italy and Southern Europe. Panelists were asked to offer their perspective on the role of the family in the Balkans as a base for social solidarity and reconciliation.



Dr Saemira Pino, former Deputy Minister of Education, spoke about the family’s capacity to foster “either peacemakers or warmongers”, and emphasized the responsibility of Ambassadors for Peace to raise families that are open to other cultures. Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, Director of the United Nations Offices of the Women’s Federation for World Peace, spoke about the current pervading trend to “deconstruct the family” and about the various forms it takes in United Nations documents and EU policies on the family, and about its influence on social norms.

Professor Daut Demaku, the Founder of the Center for Positive Thinking in Kosovo, who authored numerous inspirational books, spoke about the destined role of woman to bring peace to the family and to society. The final speaker was Mr. Jack Corley, FFWPU Eurasia chairman, who spoke on character education, emphasizing the need to base academic or technical school education upon the education of heart and norms, so that mastery and skills be rooted in a loving and ethical personality.



The last session, moderated by Mr. Ali Lacej, coordinator of the Albanians Peace Council, was on “Building an Environment of Shared Prosperity for Future Generations”. The first speaker, Hon. Ismajl Kurteshi, a Member of Parliament from Kosovo, shared his vision on how ethnic groups in the Balkans could live in harmony despite religious differences – like Albanians whose religions are different but who are able to co-exist and cooperate with each other based on common nationality. Then Hon. Sead Sahman, a young Member of Parliament from Montenegro, expressed his conviction for the need of dialogue in the Balkans, insisting that youth policies should be based on universal values and human rights.



Ms. Anita Mitić



Mr. Gani Rroshi



Mr. Hydajet Hyseni

Ms. Anita Mitić, the Serbian president of Youth Initiative for Human Rights, in a heartfelt talk, shared how young people in the Balkans too often inherited prejudices and hatred from their parents, and pleaded for more involvement of the young generation in such a peace conference and peace activities. “The millennials will turn 18-year-old in 2018 and become voters!”, she warned, referring to the generation born right after the Balkan wars. The final speech was given by Mr. Gani Rroshi, Secretary General of UPF Albania, who explored the root causes of conflict within individuals and the process of hurt and revenge, which he said we had the task to overcome. He then showed a video on the launch of the “Peace Road 2017” project and explained the plan of UPF to launch “Peace Road Balkans 2018” as a means for young people to build bridges beyond borders between Balkan nations.

To close the conference, Mr Hydajet Hyseni, an early Ambassador for Peace in Kosovo and former Member of Parliament, who was instrumental in organizing the event, reflected on the political situation in Kosovo and shared his vision on the way parliamentarians and the IAPP could benefit his country. Then, Jacques Marion briefly summarized the conference. Quoting French economist Jacques Attali’s statement that altruism would be the central value of our economic future, he said that altruism, the core value of UPF and IAPP, is not only meant to be promoted through sound family policies, but also to be the guiding principle for nations to transcend national interest and focus on the public whole – a task that is in the hands of IAPP and its network of parliamentarians.



The conference ended with the award of Ambassador for Peace certificates by Dr Walsh and Dr Otsuka to six participants: Dr Dashamir Shehi, Albanian Member of Parliament; Ms. Anita Mitić, Serbian president of Youth Initiative for Human Rights; Prof. Afet Mamuti, a Law Professor from Macedonia; Mr. Xhevdet Amuli, former president of the “Vllaznia” Soccer Club in Shkodra, Albania; Mr. Skander Krasniqi, Founder and CEO of the Kosovo Press Agency; and Dr Kujtim Pracaku, a poet, former Member of Parliament and leader of the Roma community in Kosovo.



The presence of the former presidents of Croatia, Albania and Kosovo as well as the Macedonian Speaker of Parliament, who were cared for by state protocol throughout the conference, brought not only prestige but also a sense of wisdom and dignity to this launching event of the International Association for Peace in the Balkans. The plan for “Peace Road Balkans 2018” was widely approved by participants. Plans for Soccer for Peace projects were discussed with Serbian Peace Ambassador Sinisa Ruzicic, who has led the Wongu Peace Cup European Soccer team to victory three years in a row in Korea.

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