



International Pan-European Union

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PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN CENTER FOR PEACE AND COOPERATION IN BANJA LUKA IS THE LIGHT OF NEW HOPE AND OPTIMISM FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Banja Luka hosted a round table commemorating 26th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement

“Twenty-six years ago in Paris, an international agreement was signed, restoring peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina and temporary modalities of political and administrative functioning of this country. All signees of the peace agreement wanted to first and foremost end the deadly war. The second goal was to open negotiations to create balanced and lasting democratic institutions between three integral constituents of Bosnia and Herzegovina through consensus. If the first goal was achieved, there is still the need to give this country the institutions that would allow its communities to live in harmony to build peace and progress together. Thus, I wholeheartedly support the realization of the project of the European Center for Peace and Cooperation at the former Trappist at the ‘Mary the Star’ monastery in Banja Luka and thank everyone, especially Bishop Franjo Komarica, for their courage and determination in its realization, as well as the efforts on promoting mutual understanding and tolerance,” said the President of the International Paneuropean Union **Alain Terrenoire** at today’s round table “European Peace Star in Banja Luka – 26 Years After Signing the Dayton Peace Agreement in Paris” which was organized in Banja Luka by the European Center for Peace and the International Paneuropean Union.

The Bishop of Banja Luka, **Msgr. Dr. Franjo Komarica** emphasized that this Center was built on a century-and-a-half nurtured foundation of credible and tireless humane efforts to affirm the human being in the local living environment at the greatly deserving church institution – abbey “Mary the Star” – where the Trappist monks selflessly lived, prayed, and worked, after arriving from European countries in the 16th century for the general good of the people of these parts and regions. “Through its program and offers, the Center strives to provide comforting and pacifying light and atmosphere based on new hope and optimism for the current and future generations of people living not only in the Banja Luka area but entire Southeastern Europe. This Center is, I believe deeply, the act of God’s providence, kindness, and care towards still lasting and visible to us new threatening waves of egoism, exclusivity, arrogance, carelessness, and despise of dignity, of not only the human being as an individual, but also local ethnic and religious communities, which seriously splashes numerous boats of local peoples and entire communities,” said Komarica.

Deputy High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, ambassador **Marianne Berezcz** read the letter of support to Bishop Komarica sent by the High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina **Christian Schmidt**. Among other things, the letter states: “I appreciate your years-long efforts on founding the European Center for Peace and Cooperation “Mary the Star”. Since its foundation, the Center for Peace and Cooperation has focused on giving support to youth education, strengthening multiethnic and interreligious dialogue, especially among younger generations. It is encouraging that you have already contacted relevant stakeholders and received support for this important project from the Islamic Community, Orthodox Church, representatives of civil society, the academic community, and young people from the entire region. I hope that the issue of the restitution of the land that belongs to the Catholic Church of the abbey “Mary the Star” in Banja Luka will be resolved soon so that the Church can allow construction of a modern building on the land. Catholic Church is known in Banja Luka and elsewhere for helping all people and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

Academician Pavo Barišić, Secretary-General of the International Paneuropean Union, said that today when war threats are growing once again in the east of Europe, when war trenches are being dug, and red lines that should not be crossed are being drawn, it is essential to categorically raise voice for peace. “Bosnia and Herzegovina is a substantial part of Europe. Views of past and present testify that Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the crucial points for peace and stability in Europe in the future. The Great War started on its territory at the start of the 20th century, and the last war in Europe was ended there at the end of the century. But, in it, peacemaking visions were originated and developed as well, which reside in the foundations of the modern unification of Europe. The reason teaches us that peace is a state that all humans aspire to by nature. Thus, we must greet the efforts for the memory of the brightness of the European peace star to once again flare up in Banja Luka. At “Mary the Star,” members of different nations lived together. They prayed and built the most advanced workshops and factories. They educated young people for trades and life. Worthwhile is the intention of the Bishop of Banja Luka to build in such a spiritually elevated place the European Center and the Meeting House “Mary the Star” for gatherings of young people from all over Europe and the world. We should refresh ourselves at the fountain with beauties of living together and humanly brotherhood. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a worthy cultural heritage that we should honorably open to the world,” concluded Barišić.

“I am convinced this project will succeed because it is good. And everything that is good is divine, and everything that is divine is good. It will succeed because it is a peacekeeping project, and Jesus said: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.’ We know that many people have become pessimists, but we must remind everyone that no pessimist has ever accomplished anything serious. This project is important as an ecumenical and interreligious project. Bosnia and Herzegovina is *locus theologicus* (a privileged theological place) for ecumenism and dialogue. The Paneuropean Union and “Napredak” do a lot of work in this area, especially in terms of ecumenism and dialogue of real life. If a foreign Trappist priest Franz Pfanner living during the Ottoman era could create the ‘San Marino’ of Banja Luka here, with no technology and very few people, why couldn’t today’s very agile Bishop Msgr. Franjo Komarica, using today’s technology and the same number of Catholics, could not do the same with the help of his associates,” said **Msgr. Dr. Franjo Topić**, Honorary President of the Paneuropean Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatian Cultural Association “Napredak.”

Andreas Raab, Vicepresident of the German Paneuropean Union, said on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that Bosnia and Herzegovina today is showing a lot of weakness. He reminded everyone of the promise of the European Union from 2003 that all countries of Southeastern Europe should become members of the European Union. “Unfortunately, since Croatia had joined the European Union, very little was done to fulfill that promise,” said Raab, adding that the German Paneuropean Union was extremely interested in the realization of the project of the European Center for Peace and Cooperation and gives it strong support.

The Member of the Presidency of the Paneuropean Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina **Ph.D. Miodrag Živanović** emphasized that the biggest problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other countries of the region was populism. “Populism dominates, and it has its origins in fascism and all other forms of dictatorships that stand in front of our door. It offers the return to the past with the slogan ‘our goal is to catch up with our past.’ The further we are from populism, the closer we are to the human.”

Participating at the round table was also Stella Arneri, the representative of the Croatian Minister for Regional Development and European Union Funds, who said that during the next fiscal period, 118 million euros was secured from European funds for projects of cooperation between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. She expressed her hope that the Center project will also compete for these funds, although Croatia also directly supports its realization in its budget funds.

In the end, **Zoran Piličić**, the Consul General of the Republic of Croatia in Banja Luka, greeted the guests with few words. He stated that Europe must become more involved in solving problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, believing that the only new agreement that Bosnia and Herzegovina is going to sign will be the one on joining the European Union.