

Democracy in Times of War

Challenges to our Common Humanity

I.P.O. President Hans Köchler delivers opening speech at "World Forum on Democracy & Peace" in Berlin (News release) Referring to Immanuel Kant's seminal treatise on Perpetual Peace, Hans Köchler, President of the Vienna-based "International Progress Organization", earlier this week [15–18 February 2023] reminded an audience of global leaders assembled at the "Academy for Cultural Diplomacy" in Berlin, Germany, that only a polity where citizens have an influence on the conduct of foreign affairs offers a prospect of a peace that is durable and more than a temporary cessation of arms.

Those who are directly impacted by the consequences of war must not be excluded from decisions on the most existential issue of any state, he said in the opening speech to the four-day event.

Alluding to the escalation of armed conflict in Europe, he warned of the undue influence of lobbies and pressure groups in decisions on war and peace. Dr. Köchler quoted from President *Dwight D. Eisenhower's* farewell speech of 1961 who – in the midst of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union – alerted his compatriots and the world about the "unwarranted influence" of the "military-industrial complex" and the "the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power."

Genuine democracy must be able to restrain and counterbalance the influence of vested interests. This requires transparency of political decisions, free access to information without discrimination, the absence of censorship and propaganda, and, first and foremost, freedom of expression without fear. All of these democratic essentials are under threat in times of war. Under conditions of armed conflict, not only truth may be a casualty; democracy itself risks becoming a victim of the mass mobilization of emotions, Dr. Köchler explained.

Commenting on the war in and over Ukraine, he said that it would be a fateful mistake – and a bad omen for humanity – should the political leaders, on both sides of the divide, not pay attention to the manifold popular initiatives for peace.

In four days of intense debates, moderated by Dr. Köchler – who is also a member of the Faculty of the *Academy for Cultural Diplomacy* –

politicians, diplomats, academics, students and civil society activists from, inter alia, Afghanistan, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States discussed the crisis of democracy and the threat of global war.

Among the keynote speakers were the former heads of state or government of France, Mr. *François Fillon*; of Romania, Prof. *Emil Constantinescu*; of North Macedonia, Prof. *Gjorge Ivanov*; of Tunisia, Dr. *Moncef Marzouki*; of Lebanon, Dr. *Hasan Diab*; of Lithuania, Ms. *Dalia Grybauskaitė*; and of Malta, Ms. *Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca*.

Madame *Michèle Alliot-Marie*, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defence, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Justice of France, delivered a keynote speech on "New Challenges for Democracy," warning of a policy of double standards in international affairs. In her speech on "What has Happened to Diplomacy?", Dr. *Karin Kneissl*, former Foreign Minister of Austria, addressed crucial issues of diplomacy under conditions of international conflict. Mr. *Pedro Silva Pereira*, Vice-President of the European Parliament, spoke about "Democracy under Fire: Political and Cultural Challenges."

Dr. *Sarah Wagenknecht*, member of the German Parliament, warned of the threat of nuclear war and called for a diplomatic settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The former Chancellor of Justice of the Kingdom of Sweden, Mr. *Göran Lambertz*, highlighted the importance of the rule of law in protecting democracy. Mr. *Peer Steinbrück*, Chancellor-candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Germany in 2013, discussed the global implications of "Zeitenwende" ("change of eras"), a topos introduced by German Chancellor Scholz in February 2022. The former Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Mr. *Mohammad Hanif Atmar*, outlined principles for a lasting settlement in Afghanistan on the basis of renewed intra-Afghan dialogue, including all stakeholders.

Source: I.O.P. Information Service: News Release, 18 February 2023