VUK JEREMIC

President of the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD), former President of the UN General Assembly, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia

Karl KAISER, Director emeritus of the German Council on Foreign Relations, Harvard University

Vuk JEREMIC is the next. He is the former Serbian Foreign Minister and he brings a particular perspective here. The Balkan countries are the route to the North and as we speak, there are probably 100,000 people marching.

Vuk JEREMIC, President of the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD), former President of the UN General Assembly, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia

There are probably more than 100,000 refugees marching through the Western Balkans at present, and this is something that is causing a lot of tensions and frictions in the region, which has only recently been stabilised after the conflicts of the 1990s. However, we need to be open with each other and call a spade a spade. The refugee crisis is perhaps the most serious crisis that Europe has come to face since the end of the Second World War. The very foundations—of values, institutions, and tenets—of the European construct are in danger as a result of this. The bad news is that this will not get any better; indeed, it can only get worse, because the source of this crisis continues to boil. It is not only the war in Syria; it is a wider area that we are talking about, although perhaps the most neuralgic aspect is the one centered on Syria.

Europe must be able to act decisively on this, and by this I mean dealing with the acute symptoms. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of people, and Rabbi Korsia was very eloquent in describing the moral aspects of this. It would defy the basic norms of human compassion—let alone what Europe aspires to stand for in the world—to deny those people shelter and rights. The refugee issues needs to be taken care of.

However, Europe also has to lead when it comes to addressing the source, because nobody else will—or at least not any time soon; certainly not soon enough for Europe not to feel the even bigger crisis and come to face the danger of unravelling if nothing is done. What President Hollande is trying to do by travelling next week to Washington and Moscow is a part of this, but it is not enough.

Europe must send a very decisive signal and take very decisive actions towards the other key players: the Russians, the Americans, Turkey, and others. Convene a well-prepared conference and start a process. Let us look to an example from the recent past. Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of the peace agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was signed in Dayton, Ohio. This peace agreement brought the ferocious killings in Bosnia to an end. We must work at seeing Europe acting to bring all the interested parties together to the conflict in the contemporary Middle East, centered on Syria, and catalyse the process. This will be partially a diplomatic endeavor, but it needs to be backed up by the readiness to use decisive force if necessary. Otherwise, this conflict will continue, and if it continues, we will not be able to put enough barbed wire and fences around the borders of Europe.

I will not even start talking about how Serbia and other countries in the Balkans perceive these fences that are being erected in the 21st century on the borders of our countries. I will not get into that in detail. You might imagine that people are not thrilled and elated by this turn of events, but the worst thing is that these fences will not stop people from coming. People will continue coming and the political and social effects of those hundreds of thousands of people coming will continue being felt. Yesterday, somebody mentioned a phrase attributed to Winston Churchill to the effect that Americans never fail to do the right thing, but only after having exhausted all other possibilities. This reminds me of Europe in the 21st century, but I hope that at least Europe ends up doing the right thing.