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Europe’s great responsibility

The COVID-19 epidemic is both the largest and the most global crisis we have experienced since the Second World War. And it is still far from over. It is therefore difficult to anticipate all its consequences. However, it seems already clear that the crisis should in particular act as an accelerator of previous trends. The western-led world order was already in a deep crisis before the pandemic. This is the first major crisis in decades where the US is not in the lead and the actual US administration has mostly withdrawn from the global order it has built in the past. At this stage this crisis seems likely to complete the break-up of the multilateral system, destabilise a number of developing countries and favour authoritarian regimes all over the world. In this global context Europe has a great responsibility. We have been, and are still, very much affected by the crisis, both in health and economic terms. At the outset, the Union encountered serious challenges. In my view, the Union has never been better positioned to turn this crisis into an opportunity for a Stronger Europe in the World.

By Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Vice-President of the Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World
Together in challenges & getting stronger

Slovenia is getting ready to hold the second Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2021.

/ By Dr Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

“‘We need a strong, resilient, autonomous and resource-wise sovereign European Union. We need to act together, quickly and determinedly.’”

Today’s world is different than it was yesterday. Who would have thought that the world would change so dramatically in just one year? The COVID-19 virus has changed our way of life. It has also had a major effect on our organisation of the 15th Bled Strategic Forum 2020. Only two months ago, we were unsure whether it would be possible to even hold this event because the world as we knew it at the beginning of this year had stopped. Amid the uncertainty and unpredictability, however, we felt that there is an even more profound need for open communication and collaboration. This is precisely the platform that Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) provides. Hence, we decided to proceed with the event. It is imperative that we work together and find common ground from where we can build and grow our relationships for a better and more prosperous future.

We are gathering at this idyllic lake at a time when frontline workers all around us are covered with COVID-19 related news, full of numbers showing the latest statistics of this pandemic and its implications for people’s health and life in general, as well as for our societies and economies. Our reality has changed quickly and unexpectedly. The phrase a ‘new normal’ has become a term to describe our future.

Today, the EU is facing an unprecedented challenge nobody could have imagined or foreseen when we started planning the BSF a year ago. Still, here we are. Determined to cope with the situation. And win. We need a strong, resilient, autonomous and resource-wise sovereign European Union. We must act together, quickly and determinedly. The EU – we, the Member States – have been able to reach an agreement on the most robust multiannual financial frame-

work and an entirely new Recovery Instrument. That proved, to us and to the world, to our friends and to competitors, that we possess the will and the way to overcome the crisis and become a more resilient, more ambitious and safer place for all EU citizens.

In such complex and challenging times, Slovenia is getting ready to hold the second Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2021. We are already in the Presiding Trio, together with Germany that started its Presidency in July, and Portugal, which will follow.

Whatever plans we made at the very beginning of the planning for the Presidency, they have all changed. It has become clear that what the EU needs most is to be better prepared for tackling global crises. This pandemic represents the third global crisis to affect the EU and its Member States this decade, after the financial and migration crises. And still, the EU was not sufficiently ready to cope with it. We have much work to do.

The Trio Presidency bears a great responsibility in this regard. Urgent, decisive and comprehensive action is required at all levels. The resilience of Europe needs to be reinforced. During our Presidency, Slovenia will focus on a comprehensive approach in the case of the pandemic and on strengthening the resilience of critical infrastructure and the digital single market in the event of cyber-attacks. The migration crisis we faced a few years ago is not over yet. We have to strive for comprehensive, permanent and predictable European solutions for migration that will include a functioning and crisis-proof asylum system.

Speaking about crisis, we believe we should focus on developing and implementing concrete action plans for individual stages of the crisis, and we should ensure that all the necessary facilities and equipment are provided for whenever and wherever needed. We need to improve the European Union’s crisis management system that has to be more ambitious, wide-ranging and coordinated.

But while dealing with the new reality urgently and systematically, we must continue to develop and strengthen the European economy, preserving the European and global environment and continuing to work for a better future in all aspects. We need social. We need green. And we need digital.

Our goal is a sustainable, climate-neutral and green Europe. Here in Bled, watching this beautiful lake of mixed glacial and tectonic origin, surrounded by forests and mountains, and with a small island in the middle, we can understand the importance of nature and its preservation.

We also aim towards digital transformation in the sense of establishing the digital sovereignty of the European Union. The focus should be on human-centric artificial intelligence, on the introduction of advanced technologies in society, and on the transition to a gigabit society shaped to accommodate all generations. We must not forget education and research that both serve as a basis for the development of sectoral policies and contribute to solutions in individual sectors. We believe that there is a need for a multi-level approach while using the potential of education, research and innovation for transformative solutions and achieving the sustainable development goals.

As mentioned, Bled Lake has a small island. On that island, there is a church. And on the shore, it is overlooked and thus protected by a venerable castle. Just as we need to protect our nature, we need to protect the European way of life and European values. Our joint and primary task is to protect our citizens against all kinds of crisis while preserving our European values and way of life. We intend to defend our core values: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

By building on our European values and the strengths of the European Union, we simultaneously promote the interests of our citizens, businesses and societies while safeguarding our way of life and shaping the future of the EU. Slovenia will actively contribute to The Conference on the Future of Europe, which will aim to bring the European Institutions and their decision-making bodies closer to citizens and to strengthen the bond between the European nations. The Conference should deliver concrete results for the benefit of our citizens and should contribute to our policies so that we can better tackle current and future challenges. We should not let this opportunity pass us by.

Of course, an important part of the future of the European Union is its enlargement. We need to proceed with the enlargement process in the Western Balkans smoothly and steadily. Predicted, timely and proper enlargement is a precondition for the stability, security and prosperity of the European continent. We have to think with a vision and act strategically.

Hand in hand with our European values and way of life, this crisis resilience, economic power, societal and environmental health and digital might will strengthen the role of the European Union on the global stage and help create true partnerships and alliances. The EU must retain and reinforce its role as a respected global actor.

I firmly believe that the Bled Strategic Forum, this year in its 15th edition and under exceptional circumstances, will not disappoint and will offer up fascinating and profound discussions on topics that concern us at this critical point in time that will shape our future.

Challenges are constant. So is the Bled Strategic Forum.
The challenges to European security – old and new

/ By Ambassador Tuula Yrjälä, Officer-in-Charge / Secretary General, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The COVID-19 pandemic is a sad but illustrative example of the fact that today threats to security and stability are not limited to traditional politico-military relations among states. This widespread global health emergency presents challenges not only to its direct victims, but also to all dimensions of security as defined by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the world’s largest regional security arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

COVID-19 arrived in early 2020 to an already difficult European security environment. The crisis in and around Ukraine continues for the sixth year. Fears of the unraveling of arms control agreements and confidence-building measures that have buttressed stability and co-operation on the continent since the end of the Cold War contribute to a sense of uncertainty. The role of military incidents and accidents has grown, trust has been eroding, and divides are deepening among and within States. Inward – rather than outward-looking attitudes make it harder to fulfill the potential of co-operative security.

The geo-political climate does not provide for fertile ground to counter the new generation of threats and trans-border challenges, including those in cyberspace, or the implications of potentially large migration flows. Security within the OSCE area also reflects the global political environment.

The pandemic caught most countries in the Euro-Atlantic and EurAsian area off guard. Yet it should not have come as a surprise. Already in 2003, a “widespread degradation of health” was listed in the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century. The document, agreed by all then 56 participating States in Maastricht, also assumed that in the OSCE region threats to security and stability are more likely to arise as negative consequences of developments across the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions, rather than from any major armed conflict.

By now, the virus has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives worldwide – more than any military conflict or hostility in recent history. It still has to be defeated, which complicates anticipating and handling its long-term consequences. The health crisis has not eclipsed all pre-existing conflicts and controversies. Nor has it become a game changer in prioritizing security challenges and threats in the OSCE area. However, it is arguably another strong case for more co-operation.

Over the past few months, the OSCE has promoted dialogue among its 57 participating States about the security implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and explored ways to address them co-operatively. The Organization has also sought to maintain, to the extent possible, the core functions and substance of its regular agenda, keeping in mind the post-pandemic world that will eventually emerge. For the OSCE as an organization with several thousand staff members serving in multiple locations across Europe and Eurasia in its field operations, institutions and Secretariat, the practical implications of the pandemic have been serious and complex. The Organization responded to the crisis by prioritizing duty of care for its staff while maintaining business continuity and mandate implementation. While the work of OSCE field operations, including the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and other OSCE activities, have been affected in a dramatic way, the OSCE’s committed staff and the deployment of new technologies have allowed for essential functions to be carried out. The OSCE field operations have also been able to address consequences of the crisis swiftly and flexibly within their respective mandates – for instance, by increasing attention to such issues as domestic violence.

The OSCE’s platforms for dialogue – including its Permanent Council, a weekly meeting of ambassadors from all the OSCE participating States – have continued to operate, first virtually and now in “blended” form. The OSCE has continued to support negotiation formats addressing the crises in and around Ukraine as well as proscribed conflicts in Moldova and the Caucasus region, albeit largely online. For crisis management and conflict resolution, virtual meetings are however only a partial substitute for face-to-face diplomacy. This will be one of the lessons learned from the current crisis.

The pandemic has also had an impact on OSCE-related arms control and confidence-building measures, including the suspension of regular inspection visits. It is nevertheless notable that this has happened in a constructive and consensual manner. While leaving immediate health implications to those with appropriate expertise and mandates, OSCE platforms for dialogue and executive structures engaged early and consistently to help identify immediate risks and longer-term implications across all dimensions of security. Both its inter-state multilateral bodies and its executive structures have addressed such politico-military and “cross-dimensional” implications for security as the impact on arms control, conflict management, policing, terrorism, cybersecurity, trafficking and organized crime.

OSCE bodies have looked at the disruptive impacts of the crisis on employment, connectivity, and environmental co-operation, as well as possible lessons learned. These include the dramatic increase in the use of technology by people around the world to communicate and get their work done, among others. OSCE Institutions and dialogue bodies have also done this with regard to issues within their mandates, such as by addressing the impact of the crisis on women, minorities and other vulnerable populations as well as the need to ensure that any steps affecting human rights and the functioning of democratic institutions, such as elections and parliaments and courts, would be as limited as possible and in line with international standards. In taking on the consequences of COVID-19 for security, the OSCE’s goal has been to recognize common challenges, to foster dialogue and share experiences about how best to address extraordinary challenges cooperatively and consistent with OSCE principles and commitments.

The COVID-19 crisis could have a silver lining if states devote renewed energy to dialogue and co-operation to address global challenges that are common to humanity within their mandates, such as by fighting corruption and organized crime or using technology to enhance human rights, such as by using technology to promote the rights of women, minorities and other vulnerable populations.

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On 10 March of this year, when I was wrapping up a business trip to Washington, DC, and returning to Brussels, the initial consequences of COVID-19 were already present. Some of my interlocutors already preferred to do a “corona bow” instead of a more traditional handshake. However, it was only a couple of days after, when Belgium and other NATO Allies as well as partners declared a lockdown in response to the rapid spread of the virus, that most of us truly grasped the immense impact of the pandemic. At the start of 2020, it was difficult to imagine that a virus would turn into an unprecedented stress test for the political and social fabric of our countries, our economies and indeed our very way of life. But this is exactly what has happened and we continue to deal with its consequences.

Time will tell whether the COVID-19 pandemic is a turning point in world history, a catalyst for trends that were already apparent before, or if it will allow us to continue our lives more or less as before. But COVID-19 has already made clear that pandemics can have far-reaching implications for the security of our own nations and the stability of the world around us, and that also NATO needs to continue to adapt to meet those risks and challenges.

**Strong security and mutual support**

From the beginning of the pandemic, NATO’s overriding objective has been to prevent the health crisis from turning into a security crisis. Individually and collectively, the thirty member nations of the Alliance have taken all the necessary measures to provide strong deterrence and defense, sending a clear message to any outside actor who might have been tempted to take advantage of the situation. We have bolstered the posture of our military forces. We have sustained our Alliance operations and missions abroad, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo. Key NATO exercises have been maintained, albeit in a reduced format. Moreover, since the beginning of the outbreak, NATO has used its full range of tools in supporting national and international civilian efforts in response to the pandemic. So far, some 350 flights have delivered hundreds of tons of critical supplies around the world. Almost half a million troops have supported the civilian response, constructing almost 100 field hospitals, securing borders and helping with testing. All of this has helped save lives.

We have strengthened our Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre as a central platform for assistance requests, not just from Allies but also from partners and international organizations. We activated the special Rapid Air

**Key political workstrands and early lessons**

By Ambassador Bettina Cadenbach, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

From the beginning of the pandemic, NATO’s overriding objective has been to prevent the health crisis from turning into a security crisis.
Mobility mechanism to facilitate the unimpeded air transport of medical supplies across Europe.

To ensure NATO is prepared for a possible second wave of COVID-19, Allies have agreed on a new plan – Operation Allied Hand, which involves setting up a stockpile of medical equipment, and a new fund for the quick acquisition of medical supplies to which many Allies have already offered to contribute.

Since the outbreak, the Alliance has demonstrated, once again, its unity and solidarity, as well as intensifying its cooperation with partners. Effective diplomacy has been a critical part of that endeavor.

As the pandemic has also challenged the daily working arrangements within the Alliance, we adapted to these new circumstances by strengthening the use of digital technology to minimize any disruption and ensure business continuity. Over the past months, we have made frequent and effective use of the Alliance’s secure networks, and important lessons have been learned about the value of technology to ensure timely and effective decision-making, including on the high political level, such as the meetings of NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers, which were held over secure teleconferences.

The importance of cooperation

Although we are still in relatively early stages of understanding the full scale of the pandemic, we have already learned some important lessons and responded to them. As the virus spread, most borders were closed. That has clearly been crucial to controlling the pandemic. But it’s also clear it is impossible to keep borders closed forever. And tackling the pandemic requires cooperation between states, and between international organizations, in unprecedented ways, including through the exchange of data on infection rates and patterns; sharing of best practices in disease prevention and treatment; and sharing crucial protective equipment, beds and medical professionals.

NATO is well placed to contribute to that cooperation, also as a unique platform bringing European and North American Allies together. Of course, NATO’s thirty Allies support each other: that is the definition of the Alliance. But NATO also has a broad network of partnerships with more than forty countries all over the globe. This is built on decades of political consultation and practical cooperation, such as with Australia and Japan, to name just a couple.

We put that network to good use immediately. Our Allies provided help to meet critical needs in such different locations as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Georgia, Iraq, Mongolia and Ghana, by matching requests for support with offers of assistance.

We have immediately stepped up cooperation with the European Union, which has also been very active in responding to the crisis – and with which NATO shares 21 members. Our leadership has been in constant touch. Our staffs have coordinated the efforts of the two organizations, including when it comes to tracking, analyzing and responding to the wave of disinformation surrounding the pandemic; on the impact of the pandemic on our respective missions and operations in theatres where we are both active; or regarding various assistance requests in order to ensure the complementarity of our efforts.

In parallel, we have increased our interactions with the United Nations, in particular in assisting the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, notably on the African continent, as well as with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the World Bank.

Preparing for the future

Even as we address the immediate crisis, we have to prepare for the future. With commonplace travel, high urbanization and population density, the world is vulnerable to continuing threat from this virus, and potentially from other similar threats. We need to become more resilient and better prepared – and that preparation includes engagement with our partners, sharing of lessons learned, building resilient societies, and strengthening our defences against biological threats.

With regard to resilience, it is clear that our systems need to be examined and strengthened. Enhancing resilience and reinforcing national crisis management facilities is now more prominent than ever and NATO is stepping up its work in this field. In this spirit, Allies recently took decisions to strengthen NATO’s “Baseline requirements for civil preparedness”, taking greater account of cyber threats, the security of our supply chains, and the consequences of foreign ownership and control of critical infrastructure.

Learning lessons from this crisis is a large process that underlines the key importance of cooperation among Allies as well as partners as the pandemic impacts us all and where we all have important practices and lessons to share. We have already begun this broad consultative process, to our mutual benefit, as we look to the future.

Those lessons will include strengthening our defences against biological threats. NATO already has several tools in place to strengthen the capabilities of Allies and partners in this area. NATO Centres of Excellence for CBRN Defence in the Czech Republic and for Military Medicine in Hungary provide training to Allied and partner personnel in all aspects of defending against these threats and mitigating the consequences of their use. NATO’s Science for Peace and Security Programme funds numerous scientific and technical projects to advance human knowledge and improve our ability to understand and defeat CBRN challenges. Finally, the NATO Science and Technology Organization oversees a collaborative network of some 6,000 scientists across all Allies and our partner network, which has been mobilised to share knowledge and jointly address the complex technical questions which surround the most pressing CBRN threats, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individually and collectively, the thirty member nations of the Alliance have taken all the necessary measures to provide strong deterrence and defence, sending a clear message to any outside actor who might have been tempted to take advantage of the situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that some threats respect no borders, open or closed. NATO will work with the broadest possible network of partner countries and organisations, to provide urgent support, to learn lessons, to build resilience, to defend against future biological threats, and to defend the open societies, economies and systems which Allies value so highly.

This is a trying time for the whole world: we will pass this test together.
At this stage this crisis seems likely to complete the break-up of the multilateral system, destabilise a number of developing countries and favour authoritarian regimes all over the world. In this global context Europe has a great responsibility.

demics has accentuated this. China has become more assertive – some even say aggressive - in its neighbour-hood, especially in the South China Sea or on the border with India, but also worldwide as we have seen with the recent Iran-China agree-ment. Also, Chinese leaders did not hesitate to leave aside international commitments with the imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law and to develop obvious human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

In the United States, the current administration has for years now taken steps to “contain” China, in terms of trade and technology but also security. Internal difficulties in controlling the COVID-19 outbreak and the social tensions it has created have exacerbated this trend. Some even talk now in Washington about a new “Cold War”, referring to the glob-al competition between the United States and the former USSR after World War II. However, this compar-ison does not make much sense: the circumstances are very different this time, not least because the USSR was never the economic power that China clearly is today with a very strong interdependence with the rest of the world.

As for Europe, we need to be clear where we stand. We must follow our own path and act in accordance with our own values and interests. This does not mean we should be equidistant from the two protagonists. Indeed, we share a long history with the United States, marked by a close affinity be-cause, not so much. The combination of this shared history and shared values is what China's global ambitions mean to us. This does not mean we should be indifferent to the challenges they will sell everywhere in the world, including to our own private companies.

To sum up: given everything that's happening in the world and the rise in authoritarian powers, it is import-ant to have a stronger cooperation with like-minded democracies. The EU and US should be at the heart of this effort. We should also be working closely with Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and others.

The ultimate goal of this coordi-nated effort must be the revival and a modernisation of the rules-based international order, fit for the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how necessary effective multilateralism is: nobody can beat this disease alone. If COVID 19 is not beaten everywhere, it could come back easily. It has also shown how deeply interdependent we are in economic terms. Effective multilateral-ism is also the only chance we have to overcome the very serious ecolog-ical crisis we are facing, be it climate change or the loss of biodiversity.

It is important to have a stronger cooperation with like-minded democracies. The ultimate goal of this coordinated effort must be the revival and a moderni-sation of the rules-based international order, fit for the 21st century.

For its part, the EU made clear that further steps and commitments are needed from China regarding industrial subsidies, regulatory issues and other areas.

In this triangular context, the EU and the US need to analyse together what China's global ambitions means for them, to enhance coordination and share information on our respective approaches. That's why last June we proposed to launch a high-level EU-US dialogue on this issue to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. He agreed on it and work is underway to set the modalities.

Precisely because we agree with the US on many points on China, we regret that the chosen methods in terms of American foreign policy have not always been in line with our values and interests. In this particular case in the context in which we find ourselves, consulting the EU and, at times, harmful in substance to EU interests. Whether it is by im-posing tariffs on EU products, aban-doning the EU-China investment agreement, unilaterally making decisions on the Iran's nuclear programme, damaging global action against climate change by abandon-ing the Paris Agreement or sanction-ing European companies involved in the Nord Stream project.

Let me give one example, among many, to demonstrate why the actual situation between EU and the US does not make sense: while the US is punishing Airbus and we pre-serve measures on Boeing, China is fully subsidising wide-body aircraft which they will sell everywhere in the world, including to our own private companies.

For its part, modern China was long ago the trade' has disappeared. This does not make much sense: the US, elections matter - in China even more, because the electoral system is based on a number of issues on which it plays a crucial role. China has necessarily to be part of global solutions to planet-size problems such as tackling the COVID-19 pandemic or mitigating climate change. Unlike in certain sectors in Western Europe and in the European Union we want neither to head towards a generalised stra-tegic rivalry similar to a new “Cold War”, nor towards a broad economic decoupling.

However, with the US – and with other democracies – we do share, beyond values, a number of other deep concerns on the substance of Chinese behaviour that must be ad-dressed: the persistent lack of a lev-el playing field in the economic area; the distortions effects of industrial subsidies; the absence of reciprocity in procurement rules. The list is quite long. And our impatience is growing now because we are seeing that despite Chinese commitments to address these concerns, there is insufficient follow through in terms of actual reforms.

These issues are regularly discussed with our Chinese counter-parties, like in the US-High Level Trade and Economic Dialogue (HED), which my colleague Executive Vice Pres-ident Dombrovskis held on 28 July with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He. For its part, the EU made clear that further steps and commitments are needed from China regarding industrial subsidies, regulatory issues and other areas.
However, the crucial critique of both frameworks is the same: the fights within civilizations, not between them, are the bloodiest; meaning that the struggles within cultures are primary to their outside interaction. Hence, both authors may be correct, but their assumption that civilization is a stable entity dim’s their analysis. There may be an ideational competition for global governance with a significant civilizational undertone, but the crucial disagreements take place within those contesting groupings. Thus, each culture faces challenges within and without. If tackling the latter is straightforward, this is not the case for the former. Dealing with challeng- es within the Western civilization is a problem; particularly for the EU.

We need to build on our commonalities and not let the differences between European nations hinder the process.

Therefore, how do we conceptualize Western civilization? For the new generation of Americans who do not understand the phrase ‘bleeding in Normandy’, closer transatlantic relations do not make sense. For a new generation of Europeans, Fascism, Nazism, and Communism are only difficult words to spell and pronounce. Thus, Western civiliza- tion needs to re-establish its fundamentals. Going further down this rabbit hole, it all boils down to the question of universalism and national identity.

It is not enough to claim the uniqueness of Western civilization based on the values of freedom, rule of law, human dignity, private property, and fundamental human rights. What matters nowadays is how or on what do we base these values.

The second option is a process by which we re-establish Western values on a different basis – Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Ju- deo-Christian creed. Doing so, we evade the ideational temptation of universal purity, enabling us to reap the benefits of our European coop- eration and generate self-esteem for the global governance confron- tation. Claes Ryn wrote: “We do not have to choose between universality and particularity, as postmodernists insist because of their obsession with contingency and insistence on untrammelled diversity and free- dom. Universality and particularity exist in synthesis and tension. The give and take between them con- stitutes human experience.” This is how history works. European states will resume with their unification process, but will at the same time be much more cognizant of their particularities – threats, cultures, economic exposure, critical infra- structure. European and national will not be juxtaposed against each other, but inherently joined together. Paraphrasing Prof. Ryn again, these nowadays irreconcilable entities will not just be jumbled together or mixed like oil and water, in the sense that ahistorical higher realities are somehow reflected in historical phe- nomena, but in the sense that the global and the national sometimes become the same, joining together because they need each other.

As a politician committed to the European project, I want the EU to follow the latter path. We need to build on our commonalities and not let the differences between Euro- pean nations hinder the process. If there is no organic agreement, then forcing a common action becomes tedious and drives the petty behav- ior of member states, resulting in piddling action. Instead, the EU needs to recall its founding principles and values, which are nearly summed up in the words of St. Augustine of Hippo: “In necessary things unity, in uncertain things liberty; in all things charity.” I am confident that the EU can live these principles.

It is not enough to claim the uniqueness of Western civilization based on the values of freedom, rule of law, human dignity, private property, and fundamental human rights. What matters nowadays is how or on what do we base these values.

Such a conceptualization of West- ern civilization is specific and broad enough to include also Anglo-Saxon countries. Hence, in the light of the struggle for global governance, it becomes favorable, as it is able to generate enough power to assure that the transatlantic community maintains its role in the world. A transatlantic drift would result in devastating conclusions for the EU. The United States spend only 2–3% of their GDP on their military, com- pared to previous great powers that have spent around 40%. Thus, the US dominance is on the cheap, and United States can survive by ‘going it alone’. This is not the case for the EU. The EU is, therefore, existentially dependent on transatlantic rela- tions and the union of the Western civilization. If the latter fails, the EU also fails.

Finally, I am optimistic: if we stay true to our Western values, recog- nized as a product of Greek philoso- phy, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian creed, then we stay true to our respective national cultures and identities. Hence, we can also stay true to EU principles, since one is European because one is Slovene, or German, or French. Furthermore, if the EU stays true to its principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, then it is united and can enter into relations with the United States with confi- dence. Together they can consolidate the democratic capitalist club and Western civilization in global gov- ernance and ultimately assure our prosperous future.
Transatlantic relations remain a unique, stabilizing pillar of global security. In addition to common values, their enduring vitality has reflected shared purpose and practical adaptability in the face of change. As 2020 has brought a fresh series of open strains and challenges, successfully finding ways to address them will thus again be key to extending ties’ cohesion.

The most immediate shock has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Confirmed diagnoses began in January and accelerated from March on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to death and suffering, collateral effects have included tight restrictions on transatlantic travel. Even with exceptions for students, these may choke off the people-to-people contacts vital to maintaining a longer-term sense of community. The virus’s onset also sparked a competitive scramble for medical supplies and vaccine ownership rights that only later gave way to more solidaristic humanitarian assistance via mechanisms such as NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center and the EU’s Emergency Support Instrument. Meanwhile, though pandemic-induced recession may briefly bring some defense budgets closer to NATO’s two percent of GDP target by reducing the denominator, in absolute terms recent increases in collective defense investment threaten to shift into reverse.

With the pandemic still far from over, transatlantic partners could usefully seek to revive the agenda for “closer cooperation and enhanced coordination” on both health and economic dimensions outlined in the under-appreciated 16 March statement of G-7 heads of state and government. Cooperation in vaccine development and distribution could be especially important. A second challenge, new tension with China, has overlapped with the first. Indeed, China’s opacity and delay during the coronavirus’s initial spread from Wuhan, subsequent disinformation and “wolf warrior” diplomacy, and perceived use of international praecipitation with the pandemic as an opportunity to abrogate Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” autonomy with a punitive new security law and to escalate conflict with India in the Himalayas illustrate the return of “resilience” as a front-burner security concern. The virus’s onset also shaped transatlantic interaction brought by Brexit adds another layer of complexity. Here recent proposals by the Business Europe lobby group to revive the type of transatlantic trade dialogue envisioned by the July 2018 U.S.-EU Joint Statement merit close consideration. Step-by-step, sectoral-specific adjustments could advance reciprocity and standards with wider international relevance. The challenges identified here are not an exhaustive list, but their significance and interrelated nature make them immediate priorities. Each is serious but not unprecedented. In different ways, each also illustrates the return of “resilience” as a front-burner security concern.

Transatlantic allies and partners should again employ them to renew and reinforce their ties, where appropriate together with other like-minded states, in a joint effort for their peoples’ security and well-being.

New challenges faced by Transatlantic allies illustrate the return of “resilience” as a front-burner security concern.

By Dr Matthew Rhodes, Area Studies Chair, George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen

As 2020 has brought a fresh series of open strains and challenges, successfully finding ways to address them will thus again be key to extending ties’ cohesion.
It has its flaws – some very major ones – but the European Union’s hard-won financial deal mid-July is a much-needed boost for the bloc’s reputation both at home and abroad. Within the EU, the 27 leaders’ ability to come together despite deep disagreements and debates on how much money will hopefully help heal months of public angst and frustra- tion over the bloc’s initially disap- pointed logistics and coordination of the pandemic. Equally significantly, having sorted out its internal problems, there are hopes the EU will be ready to provide much-needed, level-headed global leadership in an increasingly complex, unpredictable and anomalous world. Re-establishing public trust in EU institutions will be conditional on just how quickly the European Commis- sion and the European Parliament can step up their engagement with citizens including through the much-anticipated Conference on the Future of Europe.

The good news is that public support for “more Europe” is cur- rently high, with increasing disaffection with the US, with Biden likely to be the president, EU recovery measures kick in to ease the pandemic’s devastat- ing effects. The bad news is that details of the Conference re- main sketchy and instead of working together, EU institutions appear to be at loggerheads on the way forward.

Responding to demands for a stronger EU global role will be even more challenging, to create jobs and come to the aid of the most vulnerable, the world needs wise and inclusive decisions.

The bloc must take note of the world. EU policymakers have been declaring the death of globalisation, conveniently forgetting that the EU itself is the child of cross-border cooperation and the biggest single and stand- dard-bearer of multilateralism. As countries struggle to find the right tools for a rapid economic revamp, there is a risk that the EU, not an island and cannot cut itself from increasingly difficult global challenges.

EU action in the immediate future should focus on building a global partnership on health. EU officials have already organized two global events for COVID-19 vaccine research. Attention must be redirected to providing the World Health Organisation (WHO) with the money and power it needs to impose and monitor national health policies and ensure effective and fair global distribution of information on health emergencies, epidemics, and pandemics.

Once a vaccine is discovered, the EU must ensure equitable access to all nations, not just rich countries. In addition, European governments must continue to press for an inter- national financial-humanitarian res- cue plan to help developing countries cope with the economic devastation caused by COVID-19. With global economic gover- nance in desperate need of a brutal shake-up, the EU leaders must take the much-needed, albeit difficult, decision to jettison the G-7.

A commitment to multilateralism also means more EU engagement with other regional organisa- tions and efforts to strengthen groupings such as ASEA (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the African Continental Free Trade Area. Since the economic recovery and reopening are likely to be incremental and region- al, with governments implementing stimulus policies to boost dom- estic consumption and near-shoring supply chains, regional blocs will become ever more important.

Third, the EU cannot be seen as a credible moral authority until it puts its own troubled house in order. Currently, the EU’s role and reputa- tion as a human rights defender is becoming tarnished by a weak response to the interconnected challenge posed by migration and populism.

European government’s treat- ment of migrants and refugees con- tinues to be criticised as heartless and in breach of international rules by non-governmental organisations. Meanwhile, EU plans for a “fresh start” through a new “Migration Pact” have been put off until autumn as officials seek to win support from recalcitrant anti-migration leaders like Hungary’s Viktor Orban.

A tendency in Europe to speak of migration and security in the same breath, thereby implicitly linking the two, also needs to change, especially in view of evidence of the growing threat posed by Far-Right extremism across Europe. Practising what the EU preaches on values also means strengthening a proposed link in the new recovery fund between access to EU money and respect for the rule of law. The current agreement between EU leaders has been criticised for being too vague in making a clear commitment to fairer rules.

The world will be watching progress on this particular question as the EU Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament try and thrash out a cross EU institutional agreement on the budget and the recovery fund by the end of the year.

In an encouraging move, the European Commission has rejected grants under a twinning programme for six Polish cities because of their views on the rights of LGBTI persons. But the debate has revived scop- icism about the EU’s talk of values and its commitment to actually applying them when needed. This disconnect has far-reaching conse- quences not just within Europe but also in the EU’s dealings with coun- tries in its neighbourhood, including Belarus and Russia and those further away like China.

EU action to uphold the rule of law has been exposed in recent years by the shortcomings of the so-called “Article 7” bloc disciplinary proceed- ings launched against Poland in 2017 and Hungary in 2018.
The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the global world into a shift towards enhanced cooperation among neighbours and regions. Multilateral organisations remain on the margins. Multilateralism is ceding place to geopolitics. The reshaping of and adapting to the new reality is not only a new trend but a necessity for our survival. The European Union is facing new challenges related to its internal structural efficiency, fundamental values and external action in the world of major global players. It is also facing a security threat from those who are against its unity and power. The EU is in the centre of attention of important actors and their geopolitics. Despite all the criticism about the functioning of the EU and its Member States, it is important to note that the Union has managed to withstand the COVID-19 shock. So, how to proceed further?

Three main challenges

In the upcoming period of threatening global economic recession due to the pandemic, the following three challenges should be tackled appropriately in order to maintain the Union’s internal cohesion and building up its role in the international sphere:

1. Management of the ongoing pandemic and its consequences by strengthening EU policies

The virus is not going away. We are not living in a post-COVID world. We are still in the midst of the pandemic and we will continue to live in this world until a successful medicine or vaccine is developed. For that reason, we need to enhance the resilience of societies and countries. The EU should avoid repeating the mistakes it made during the corona crisis when individual nations–states responded to cross-border crises without a common approach. Healthcare remains a part of national policies, but we in the EU need to build long-term solidarity and cooperation to tackle common and large-scale problems. It is imperative to develop European health sovereignty and self-sufficiency in the production of protective equipment. A health crisis can rapidly lead to economic and social turmoil. The recovery fund, albeit temporary, sends an important political message of unity in times of crisis. It can also be the Europeans’ victory over the Sovereignists. In the long run, the issuance of EU sovereign bonds could even expedite the EU’s financial autonomy from the US and contribute to the euro’s potential to become the world’s reserve currency, which would consequently also strengthen the EU’s role in foreign policy (sanctions). No doubt, the fund will shape the future of the EU, as it introduces new elements of transnational European economic solidarity. With public investments and interventions, it could even reshape the current liberal EU economic model. The fund is essential for combating the impending recession, in which both wealthy and less prosperous Member States are interdependent. Its principal strength is precisely preventing new divisions within the EU: into those Member States that were not affected by the corona crisis (wealthy, “frugal states”) and those that were poor, “indebted states”). If one Member State goes bankrupt, it affects all the others. Even Germany, though hesitant towards the concept of a transnational union and debt mutualisation, acknowledged this. Corona, paradoxically, reversed the EU from a problem to a solution. It would, therefore, be desirable to complete the establishment of a functional Banking Union as soon as possible, particularly of the Capital Markets Union and its third element of European guarantee that is opposed by the wealthy Member States because of the potential debt solidarisation. This would create a basis for increasing the EU’s global economic competitiveness, especially in competition with China and the US, by economic and social transformation, investing in science, innovation, and digital and green economy. This is called economic sovereignty of the EU. In this regard, caution needs to be exercised to avoid further growing disparities in the cohesion within the EU that would have a reverse, destructive effect on the degree of integration the EU has already managed to achieve. The imbalance of the economic power between Germany and all other countries, particularly Italy, which is increasingly lagging behind, is causing particular concern.

The EU’s migration and asylum policy is another priority policy area where positions within the EU seem to be most dissenting. However, there is awareness in the EU that the current state of affairs in these two areas, which encourages the rise of populism and political extremism, is unsustainable. It seems that the agreement on this policy will be the toughest nut to crack in the EU but it is of utmost importance to properly regulate migration and asylum policies for the future of the EU. The same goes for the shared European values that need to be clarified, particularly the rule of law, to ensure the proper functioning of the Single Market and role of the EU in the geopolitical world.

By strengthening EU policies, the Union, as well as every single Member State, becomes stronger in facing global challenges. The mobilisation of the Solidarity Fund and national Action plans for necessary economic or development reforms for the countries that will benefit from the fund will be of key importance in the coming year. The fund can only be successful if its resources are to be used for a productive transformation and global competitiveness of countries and societies, in line with the national priorities for Europe’s common good. Solidarity and responsibility, digital, green, resilient.

2. Brexit:

The coronavirus crisis has overshadowed the negotiations on future relations and partnership between the EU and the UK at the end of the transition period. There will be no positive Brexit outcome, not for the UK, nor for the EU. In the meantime, the UK has become less ambitious as regards its close ties with the EU, and the negotiations have practically stalled. Even the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol is now uncertain. The UK is playing a tactical game; it is seeking to maximise its interests, particularly in terms of greater competitive advantages in the single market. While the EU is negotiating a comprehensive treaty, the UK is solely aiming for a simple free-trade agreement and multiple separate sectoral agreements. It seems that the UK is learning more towards reaching free-trade agreement and in general, closer relations with the US rather than with the EU. Despite the fact that almost half of Britain’s exports go to the EU and that its GDP fell by 20% following the corona crisis, the UK is still seeking new opportunities in a new policy concept called “Global Britain”. That might be against the UK’s commitments undertaken in the Political Declaration accompanying the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement.

It is of particular concern that the UK, having no privileged access to the defence market, is against reach-
ly challenging.

The situation could become extreme-

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17+1 Chinese European initiative.

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What if cyberspace represents a path to compete for strategic ends—to shift relative power nationally, regionally, and globally—without engaging in war?

By Prof. Richard J. Harknett, Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Cincinnati, Co-Director of the Ohio Cyber Range Institute, and Chair of the Center for Cyber Strategy and Policy

It has become commonplace to note that cyberspace is a critical component of contemporary eco- nomic life, as a backdrop for modern communications; an essential tool for political organizing; and, the pillar of 21st century social interaction. What has tended to get less focus is the significance of what the cumula- tion of all those roles means—cy- berspace is a strategic asset in and of itself; that, is it directly impacts the relative power of states in interna- tional politics. Securing cyberspace, therefore, is not simply about secu- ring economic resources or protecting critical infrastructures or guarding personal privacy. Rather, we need to understand the management of cyberspace as fundamentally an im- portant responsibility of governance, in all its forms (national, multilateral, and international).

The proliferation with this network of information technology infra- structures, which includes but goes beyond the internet, is its inherent nature as a connected architecture that never anticipated all the roles it would play and the strategic implications it would come to acquire. Thus, it is a platform and environ- ment for activity, whose foundation simultaneously produces enormous vitality and extraordinary vulnerabil- ity. The care governance issue, thus becomes, how one ensures that the latter does not subsume and over- take the former.

To achieve the positive outcomes that flow from its vitality, we must accept vulnerability to exploitation of networked computing as inherent—the very structure that produces gain open security. Given this inherent dichotomy, one must consider the prospect of redefining what security means in a cyber context.

From the strategists’ perspective a counter-intuitive point arises—the very opportunity to compete for strategic gain without going to war creates significant incentive to calibrate cyber operations so they in fact achieve that very success—gain without war.

We have been here before in the face of significant technological disruption. In 1945, the world ab- sorbed the fact that one plane with one bomb could destroy an entire city. Strategists quickly realized that national security could no longer be attained through defense, since no defense was one hundred percent perfect. Security had for millennia- ums been measured by one’s own hands but the devastation that nuclear weapons promised meant that one’s security now rested in the decision-making of others. It was no longer—there was a bandwagon effect that you cannot be convinced not to initiate war in the first place. The technology required an ever-widening array of strategies. How do you secure the nation when you cannot defend it? Deterrence strategy emerged as the strategists’ response to a technology, whose very nature, overwhelmed defense. In 2020, it is time for us to con- sider that once again technological advancement is of such a nature that it, in fact, disrupts the very definition of strategic action and thus the op- erationalization of security. While nu- clear weapons required security to be achieved differently, it did not change the focus on war as the mechanism for strategic change, although as Bernard Brodie noted it changed the purpose of military capability which now possessed so war could be avoided but not fought and won.

But what if cyberspace represents a path to compete for strategic ends—to shift relative power nation- ally, regionally, and globally—without engaging in war? What if the basic features of this technology enable us to simply avoid deterrence the- oretical shifts, while achieving outcomes that to date required the crossing of sad thresholds? Would we not need to re-conceptualize and re-operation- ize our approach to security once again?

What are these features of cyber- space that might prove to be so dis- ruptive? First, every policy document on cyberspace begins with the notion that it is ‘global and interconnected’. And yet, what follows tends to treat that as a throwaway line, rather than the organizing principle. A stron- ger interconnected strategy must understand that cyberspace is not simply a military domain; it is a domain in which the military must operate simultaneously with the business sector, allies, advers- aries, and individuals (including fit and overweight hackers). Second, interconnectedness means that na- tional security actors are in ‘constant contact’ with the adversary and other important players. This is distinct from imminent or potential contact that exists in other domains. Con- stant contact is the condition that flows from interconnectedness and, unlike in deterrence spaces, suggests that strategy must assume that action is never absent. Third, at the tactical level, the ‘terrain’ of cyber engagements is constantly changing. This is human-created space and ev- ery new software version, platform, user interface and process shifts that terrain. It is perpetually under construction and, importantly, most of this technology is iterative—it is constantly redefining itself and extending beyond itself.

These structural features require rethinking the meaning of offense and defense in cyberspace as surely as nuclear weapons did for terrestrial conflict. The systemic structure of interconnectedness, the condition of constant contact, and the shifting nature of technological terrain combine to produce a very distinct dynamic, which is best understood as cyber persistence. Defense is possible in cyberspace: the offense does not dominate structurally as in the nuclear environment. However, you can only defend in the moment on the terrain that exists at the time of the defensive act. With the next iteration, the target, the tactical problem, and the attack route will all be different. Nor does defense cause ‘attrition’ of attacking forces as in a conventional engagement, meaning entry costs to act provide no barrier for state and non-state actors to compete effectively. Thus, there is a fluidity to this interconnected domain that creates simultaneously continu- ous burdens for defense and oppor- tunities for offense.

Cyber persistence is therefore a structurally-driven dynamic char- acterized by actors with continuous willingness and capacity to produce security challenge. Security, thus, cannot be achieved in the absence of action. Rather it rests in challenging others’ pursuit of cyber initiative through a comprehensive strategy encompassing resiliency, active defense, and cyber security operations. The key to cyber initiative is whether one can anticipate the exploitation of emergent vulnerabilities; and in that context, we face a fundamentally different scenario where simultaneously anticipating where exploitable vulnerability exists in competition. To enhance security in cyberspace might best be conceived as a form of wrestling in which I am constantly changing. The speed of these interactions creates an operational environment in which even the analytical terms of offense and defense maneuver do not capture what is occurring. If I use someone’s access into my network, then I stop the code in order to ‘hack back’ and take that capability away from them, I am using a cyber initiative. A better conceptualization is that I was contesting and gaining the cyber initiative. Strategists must treat this as an opportunity of action, one that gives us latitude in the development and explore its tempo and its art. As powered automated interaction, ma- chine learning and full Artificial Intel- ligence emerge, operational time will not be simply reduced, but crucially Strategists must explore how de- cision-making through algorithms most people cannot understand will affect the dynamics of strategic competition, crisis management, as well as war. As more national power emanates from this domain, having the initiative will be fluidly contested by all enabling actors.

Recognizing that cyber per- sistence is structurally driven does not mean we can ignore the fact that we face a security environment of continual action forever. Networks are built to be resilient, and so far, they seem to be enduring. We need deeper exam- ination of what stability and security look like if the essence of cyberspace is that it is a resilient-vulnerable system, whose dynamism requires persistence. Using a legacy construct of deterrence, whose measure of eff- ectiveness is the absence of action, to organize an environment of con- stant action will not take us where we need to be. Like our predecessors of the 1940s and 50s, we need new intellectual constructs to understand real-world strategic interaction and to shape policy effectively toward a more secure cyber-enabled global system.

The behavior of a number of states seems to align with the dict- ates of cyber persistence and some, such as the United States, have explicitly moved toward a strategy of persistent engagement and a construct of defend forward (actions outside of cyberspace) that can unbalance adversaries and regain initiative over exploitation of vulnera- bilities. Both Iran and Israel over the past several years have engaged in a series of cyber interactions that look like campaigns seeking to address the setting and resetting of initiative over the conditions of security and insecurity in cyberspace.

There will be no real technical barrier to cyber operations and campaigns that seek strategic gain. Countering those efforts will require foresight balanced with a cautious- ness not to push too far. Unfortu- nately, we are likely to see experi- mentation and more activity before any forms of stabilization will occur. However, there is nothing inherent in the interactions that necessi- tates loss of control, nor inevitable escalation. From the strategists’ perspective, a counter-intuitive point arises—the very opportunity to compete for strategic gain without going to war creates significant incentive to calibrate cyber oper- ations so they in fact achieve that very success—gain without war. So, while structurally driven to persist, there is an equally powerful strategic rationale to leverage persistence, and not overshoot it. As strategists begin to understand the need to persist, we must encourage them to also embrace the rationale of playing within the confines of a competitive environment short of war. We must assume there will be a significant amount of practice in cyber opera- tions—we must study the conditions that will ensure that such practice remains perfect in its alignment with strategy that seeks gain without war. That is the strategic context and importance of cyber persistence.
The relationship between technology and its social impact is particularly complex in the view of conflict analysis. On the one hand, technology is one of the key determinants of the environment in which it was developed, and on the other, it changes this same environment beyond recognition. Communication capabilities of digital information technology form the basis for the emergence of temporary societies into information societies. Security in the global age has basically changed in conceptual (theoretical) as well as practical sense for the individual, nation-states and supranational organizations. Focusing on cyberrelated thesis that realpolitik of the future is essentially cyber policy (cyberpolitik), because cyberthieves have not been only states.

Today, the modern international environment is significantly more dynamic and unstable than the times when kinetic warfare in the physical environment was the most common instrument for achieving geopolitical goals. In the era of digitalization and information revolution, information and communication technologies (ICT) are becoming the main driving force behind the unprecedented expansion of data acquisition, processing and transmission, acquired a special role in the concept of the state. ICT and its transnational nature are fundamentally undermining the power of large and small states and non-state actors. Today we are witnessing global tectonic shifts and redistribution of (social) power at international as well national levels. The power of states in a virtual world defined by media and information infrastructures is reducing economic costs and barriers to social power. In the field of security studies, a new era of renaissance of the role of the state in ensuring security.

Particularly in the first phase it seemed that the state would be most disadvantaged by the information revolution. Today, however, we are undoubtedly witnessing a renaissance of the role of the state in ensuring security. Is information-communication technology (ICT) ensuring or threatening global security? By Dr Uroš Svete, Director, Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia

The spread of the use of information and communication technology throughout the world is one of the most important factors influencing relations between countries as well as among other actors in the modern security environment, in which individuals, NGOs, terrorist and other groups play an increasingly important role. The role of ICT in the concept of instrumental power must therefore be urgently addressed through the framework of the state because hackers, terrorists, as well as countries that can control information warfare, are extremely difficult to control. ICT can be both positive and negative in terms of instrumental power. Although the power of information should by no means be connected solely with the use of ICT or the information society, it has nevertheless acquired completely new dimensions. Whether new forms of social power will also be crucial for the development of relations between security actors and whether they will decide current and future conflicts, time will tell.

Changes in the global power structure, also or mainly on the basis of ICT, best reflect the growing importance of conceptualizing asymmetric and hybrid threats that have spilled over into a framework to characterize the features of contemporary conflicts. The usage of asymmetric-hybrid approaches to achieve strategic goals did not begin with the development and expansion of information technology. But the symbiosis between the idea of asymmetry, technological characteristics of information technology and its social implications brought about such great changes. Internet has significantly changed the communication strategy and organizational culture of modern asymmetric and hybrid actors, because once strictly hierarchically organized participants in the conflict have today become highly decentralized and increasingly difficult to defeat.

The capacity for manipulation has increased, as well as the difficulties in forming stable coalitions - reliance on coalitions increases the vulnerability of all coalition partners in the event of asymmetric and hybrid threats. Building strong coalitions is particularly important in the fight against actors operating across national borders, such as terrorist organizations, organized crime groups, violent political groups and individuals who use digital media to achieve their goals. All social spheres (public and private) as well as both civilian and military targets can be the goal of such threats. This feature is one of the most important ones, which mainly affects the establishment of a crisis management system and the perception of threats. The unlimited intentions also have the effect of redrawing the relations between the elements of the national security system, both between the defence and security elements and within, both as (x) and military defence, intelligence services - police, gendarmerie.

Inequality in the information development and use of ICT by modern societies and countries is obviously one of the most important technological factors that forces the technological weaker parties to exploit the opponent's weaknesses or conduct warfare based on an asymmetric approach. Inequality in information development does not only refer to those aspects of the use of ICT that led to the last revolution in military affairs strengthening the conventional power of these countries, it also refers to information and communication (internet) and media field, where some less developed countries and societies understand this use of ICT only as a new instrument for the implementation of the already mentioned (virtual) cultural imperialism. Regardless of the emphasized negative sides of information technology, there are also those elements that provide security not only by responding and eliminating threats, but also those that create a social environment of balanced and integrated development and emphasize positive security, which is not just the absence of threats. Access to data and information, the potential for knowledge enhancement, decentralized economic development, natural disaster management and more efficient social organization are just some of the potentials of information technology that need to be exploited, strengthened and developed in order to ensure security and stability on a global level.
Despite the fact that there have been at least 16 different elections and referenda that were (to a greater or lesser degree) targeted by Russian influence activities since 2014 in Europe

The weak reaction against information aggressors so far has resulted only in more aggression. This pattern needs to change.

By Jakub Kalenský, Senior Fellow, the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab

In the US, one electoral process that the Kremlin tried to influence resulted in more than a dozen investigations. In Europe, more than a dozen electoral processes that the Kremlin targeted resulted in zero investigations.

A suicidal pattern

The lack of investigations has several implications, all of them bad for Europeans and favourable for the Kremlin and any other information aggressor. The first of them is that Europe does not have as much information about Kremlin’s efforts as the Americans have. Almost every report resulting from various investigations in the US produced some new knowledge, which led to increased chances to defend against future attacks. It also generated new headlines in the media and further raised the awareness about Russia’s disinformation operations. Where there is no investigation from the authorities, there is only investigations from research from the media and civil society that has no legal implications, and that is easily dismissed by the skilful, state-sanctioned trolling from the current representatives of Russia.

Another implication of the lack of investigations is undermining the effect of information operations. As described in Ion Mihai Pacepa’s book “Disinformation”, the KGB had a three-level approach to communicate situations unfavourable to the USSR and during events like MH17, or poisoning of the Skripals, or any election interference, we see that the current disinformation campaign of the Kremlin follows exactly the same pattern. 1. Deny the wrongdoing. 2. If you cannot deny it anymore, deny that it would have any impact. 3. If it’s impossible to deny the wrongdoing and its impact, accuse the enemy of similar wrongdoing.

Far too often, the Step number 2 is unwittingly spread even by many Westerners. “OK, so the Kremlin tried to meddle into our elections, but how do we know it had any impact?” The author of this piece has heard this sentence or its variation dozens of times, usually followed by a justification of the lack of reaction to the Kremlin’s information meddling in various Western European countries. We would never tolerate a similar behavior when it comes to a different crime. “OK, we have established that the criminal tried to murder his victim, but since we do not know whether the victim is actually dead, we don’t need to care about the criminal’s actions, let him go.” If anything, the lack of knowledge about the impact and effects should result in more investigations, not less.

And finally, the lack of investigations means that there are no undesirable consequences for the information aggressor. Which means that the Kremlin can freely continue with its information aggression. Moreover, it means that other aggressors see that Europe allows this kind of aggression, and does not punish it. Which, unsurprisingly, means that they learn from the Kremlin and use the same weapons.

As we saw during the recent disinformation campaign related to COVID-19, it was not only Russia anyone that was spreading lies, conspiracies and disinformation about the virus — it was also China, its state media and its state representatives who were spreading disinformation about the origin of the virus.

We see that not only is the Kremlin spreading the same amount of disinformation as two or three years ago, if not more. We also see that there are other actors who have decided to adopt the same strategy and bombard Europeans with disinformation serving their political purposes.

On the current trajectory, the problems with disinformation are likely to grow not better for the Kremlin. It is pretty much the same sentence that the former head of MI6’s Russia desk Christopher Steele has used when talking about the failure to punish bad actors for their efforts to manipulate the information environment—something that is easy to dismiss by the skilful, state-sanctioned trolling from the current representatives of Russia. The Kremlin is pretty much the same sentence that the former head of MI6’s Russia desk Christopher Steele has used when talking about the failure to punish bad actors for their efforts to manipulate the information environment—something that is easy to dismiss by the skilful, state-sanctioned trolling from the current representatives of Russia.

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EU is not only in the midst of the growing US-China rivalry but will also have to contend with the evolving Chinese-Russian relations.

/ By Katja Gersak, Executive Director, Centre for European Perspective (CEP), Editor-in-Chief of Bled Strategic Times

When projecting EU’s influence globally and will remain a major challenge big powers. Speaking with one voice is and will remain a major challenge when projecting EU’s influence globally, but this does not mean that the EU has no leverage. As the world’s largest trading bloc, the EU economic allure is undeniable, as is its leadership in sustainability as well as its fundamental values rooted in human rights and rule-of-law.

In a world where multilateralism is no longer the predominant organizing principle, the EU needs to solidify a stronger global role. In the midst of a growing confrontation between the US and China, the EU is faced with an urgent question of how to position itself. Furthermore, the EU needs to anticipate that it will be facing increased challenges to its internal cohesion also resulting from the global rivalries of big powers.

The prevailing mantra in the EU is that it will choose its own path. But maintaining some sort of neutral ground while equally engaging with both the US and China is not only unrealistic but also obsbers certain realities. Namely, the transatlantic bond is not like any other bond between two international actors. Despite its issues and challenges, the US and EU are joined at the hip. Economically the EU and the US are intertwined. Furthermore, the EU member states cannot guarantee their security outside of the NATO umbrella, and the biggest contributor to NATO, as we all know, is the United States. And finally, it is values, values, values. All engagement with international actors comes down to values - the fact that we value individual rights, we value openness, individual liberty and democratic participatory societies. It is reflected in our homes, work spaces, public spaces and in the international arena. This is the part we shall not compromise on because we firmly believe it embodies the progress of humankind. Therefore discussing the great power relations as if the EU is divorced from the US would be a gross oversight.

When it comes to China, there has been an evident shift in Europe in the perception of Chinese influence and the EU-China relationship. In the statement following the EU-China summit in June 2020, given by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel and President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen the tone was notably more negative. Its title starts with ‘Deferring EU interests and values’ and the statement goes on to say that ‘we do not share the same values with China.’ This is reflective of the EU frustration as the negotiations have not reached any positive conclusion. In short, EU is not getting anything out of China that the Chinese do not want to give. And it is becoming painfully obvious that the EU has very little leverage over China when it comes to reciprocity and fairness on trade and investment issues.

China is expanding its influence in Europe increasing its reach in business as well as in the policy-making community. The EU remains a source of innovation and a destination for Chinese investment and given deteriorating relations between the US and China, the Chinese are not interested in rocking the boat with the EU at present. Europe’s continued openness to Chinese capital is a boon at this point. Basically the Chinese are interested in extracting best possible deals while making sure EU countries are linked to China through infrastructure and digitally, hence it is investing in ports, roads, railways and penetrating in the digital sector, namely with Huawei, but also other tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent.

However, this does not mean that the Chinese view the EU as a monolithic block. The Chinese Communist Party has a vision for the country’s development and global influence, which is long-term, far-reaching and well-defined. Unfortunately, democracies with term limited governments are certainly at a disadvantage when it comes to long-term planning. Chinese strategy in Europe is the age old game of ‘divide and rule’.

The Chinese interests with regards to the European space are much more varied and conditioned by geopolitics. Namely, the Chinese view Europe also in the context of its proximity and interlinkages with Russia. Hence the European countries, which were once a part of the Soviet Union and countries of ex-Yugoslavia have a special place in Chinese geo-strategic planning. The Chinese realize that Russia is a power it will have to contend with, as much as with the US. While the US economic and military might cannot be compared to any other power, it is geographically removed and always will be ‘oceans apart’; Russia, however, is and always will be a power to contend with on the Eurasian continent and a neighbor of China. Hence the Chinese engagement with countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) will be done with undertones of extending influence in geographic areas which Russia considers a part of its national interest. China is in the long-run building leverage in CEE with the aim of having an influence on Russia. The Chinese-Russian relations will evolve from partnership to rivalry and the Chinese will be well positioned in all the regions, which are of strategic importance to Russia — Central and Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Southern Europe (namely Greece) and going further inland to Central Asia.

Despite of Chinese messaging focused on investment, the 17+1 Initiative is about geo-strategy not economics. With the big power rivalry the importance of CEE on the geopolitical map is growing. The region now also cooperates through the 3 Seas Initiative, connecting countries in the area between the Black, Baltic and Adriatic seas; bringing together 12 states from CEE and the United States. It is not only meant to strengthen regional cooperation but also seeks to reduce developmental differences between these countries and the older EU member states. Its core pillars are infrastructure, energy and digital. All the areas crucial to regional development and also all the areas where China and Russia are vying for influence.

The CEE region can gear up as it is going to become a geostrategic battleground. This will present an additional challenge to the coherence within the EU. Regional cooperation is crucial; through 3 Seas Initiative as well as other venues, however this needs to be firmly grounded within the EU. Unity is the only thing that will ensure security, stability and progress of the EU member states in the coming decades.
Europe (un)changed?

Human Rights, Western Balkans and European unity

/By Tobias Flessenkermer, Head of Office, Council of Europe, Belgrade, Serbia

On Saturday, 11 July 2020 state-ments of European and world leaders echoed with a car-battery factory in Potočari. The speakers were un-able to travel in person to Bosnia and Herzegovina for the occasion. Many of them had planned, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović Burić sent a video message which rose to the occasion. The occasion was the 25th com-memoration marking the genocide that took place in Srebrenica and surrounding municipalities after the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) left on 11 July 1995, abandoning thousands of people in a war that was fought against the civilian population of Eastern Bosnia. “We had hoped that such atrocity was no longer possible on our continent and in our times. But it happened” said Pejčinović Burić in the Srebrenica genocide 8,372 Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian, mainly men and boys were murdered.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Stras-bourg-based political organization of 47 European states, which is con-sidered the guardian of human rights in Europe, reminded in her message how important it is, “that the truth is established and known. And that justice is served.” More than 100,000 people were fighting during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Millions were forced to leave their homes or lost them because of the war and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. The rape of women and girls was ordered and condoned by military officers as a particularly perfidious war crime.

Hope or aberration

During the 1990s human rights were violated - often systematically - throughout the Western Balkans region. The Srebrenica genocide was one of the most heinous but by far not the only terrible crime committed in those years. Some of the major crimes have been investigated and adjudicated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, while many others have been dealt with by courts in the region and elsewhere. Proceedings and investigations are continuing until today as does the search for the missing; thousands of persons remain unaccounted for today. Marija Pejčinović Burić recalled that “rememberance serves not only to honour the victims but as motivation for each of us to do what we can to prevent any such thing from happening again.”

The commemoration in Srebrenica this year was a sombre reminder of our not too distant European past. A reminder of how Europeans due to a lack of moral and political unity have not individually, but collectively. A reminder how societ-ies dehumanised their members, citizens, neighbours, others - dis-possessing, degrading, expelling and ultimately killing people. No one could claim that they did not know what was happening, satellite-TV was beamed from the frontlines of the conflict. The Council of Europe summit in Vienna 1993 warned “Europe is a source of immense hope which must not be destroyed by territorial ambitions, the resurgence of aggressive nationalism, the perpet-uation of spheres of influence, intoler-ance or totalitarian ideologies. We condemn all such aberrations. They are plagues of peoples of former Yugoslavia into hatred and East and threatening other regions.”

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was ended with General Framework Agreement for Peace signed in Paris on 14 Decem-ber 1995. It was not to be the last armed conflict in this region in the 20th century. Generals of hope for a better future in and with European values emerged on 10 June 1999 after the hostilities had ended in the then “Federal Republic of Yugo-slavia.”

Promises

Already at the time of the Vienna summit in October 1993 Slovenia had become a member of the Council of Europe. Slovenia was one of the strongest supporters and advocates of a value-based international order, effective multilateralism and European policy responses to the challenges in her immediate neighbourhood. As was stated at the Vienna summit, “the end of the division of Europe offers a historic opportunity to consolidate peace and stability on the continent. All our countries are committed to pluralist and parliamentary democ- racy, the indivisibility and universality of human rights, the rule of law and a common cultural heritage enriched by its diversity.” For the other countries of the region, soon to be called the Western Balkans, European unity was an aspiration of merely a few vision-aries in the early 1990s. While peace remains an indispensable prerequi-site for human rights, a return from the abyss requires more; it needs momentum and determination. How to create the conditions for Europe to “become a vast area of democratic security?”

How to enlarge not only the membership of the Council of Europe but also of the European Union? How to create sustainable conditions for human rights in the Western Bal- kans? How to manage transforma-tion and change people’s lives for the better?

Human Rights

Since 1990, starting with Hungary on 6 November 1990, the Council of Europe prepared itself to integrate all countries of the region, as well as the Western Balkans into full membership on the basis of the principles of pluralist democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Council of Europe’s contribution was considered instrumental, also for the European Union to recognise its parliamentary and intergovernmental bodies and institutions, its European norms embodied in the European Convention on Human Rights, and the fruit of Slovenia’s independence declared on 25 June 1991. Thirty years on Slovenia has the privilege to once again advance European unity, because the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law that could not be honoured in Srebrenica in 1995 can be realised for the entire Western Balkans at last.

The author is writing in his personal capacity. The views set out here are those of the author and do not neces-sarily reflect the official opinion of the Council of Europe.
Half of the Fund’s grant applications originated outside WB6 capitals and from newly established organizations, another confirmation that the values of regional cooperation are widely represented and growing. The overall amount required to meet the demand, would be more than 9.5 million Euros, or more than 12 times higher of budget we were able to provide. Through 43 projects already closed, more than 10,000 individuals have come together in a variety of exiting initiatives, aiming to know better each other, supporting reconciliation and exchange of best practices. These figures show that communities and peoples in the region are willing and ready to work together, to cooperate regionally in diverse set of projects, initiatives and actions. They also show that the situation on the ground is aligned with the Fund’s objective to strengthen good neighborly relations.

COVID-19 – a gift to the opponents of regional cooperation? Not if we can help it.

The advent of Covid-19 and the health, security, social and political fallout represents a new challenge for the WBF and overall regional cooperation processes. The regions where gains achieved in regional cooperation are still fragile in a context of regional fragmentation, there is no time to retreat behind borders and boundaries. As the civil society organizations across the region are left out from Government support schemes, they are struggling with the impact of the pandemic on their core funding. Meanwhile those who do not favour the growth of regional cooperation may perceive the pandemic as a wake-up call for regional cooperation. Unless we take concerted action to adapt donor programmes, the gains made in recent years could be reversed. True, the pandemic is making people-to-people contact almost impossible, for the short-term. One of our concerns is that the fear of infection will be stoked to create long-term opposition to regional exchange, and thus undermine the nascent culture of regional mobility that the WBF seeks to enable. As organizations struggle financially in the wake of the pandemic, many find themselves in survival mode, and do not perceive regional connectivity as critical to their survival. Donors surely, have to step up and prove them wrong. This is the time to reinforce all virtual approaches that no longer make sense when the whole world has changed, six months after the plan was written.

Thus, when the pandemic hit, the Fund immediately mobilised a series of adaptations to its partnership and support approach aiming delivering results:

- The Secretariat continues to be fully operational, using a hybrid of remote and onsite work methods.
- The Fund’s grant programme is now even more targeted than before. We are adapting our support to the individual needs and circumstances of all our partners. Contract negotiations and advisory meetings and monitoring continue, unabated.
- The main challenge is to ensure the continuity of projects, while not jeopardizing the desired impact and mitigating the risks. We are providing hands-on support to grantees, maximum flexibility for best solution and preparing back-up plans for transforming physical activities in virtual ones.
- We are increasing the level of communication with our partners, and using a wide variety of social media instruments adapting our approach according to the technology they have available. This is important for organisations who do not enjoy rapid internet access, and particularly important in terms of accountability.
- We are learning. Like many organisations, we are reviewing our face-to-face approach examining new ways of being present with our partners, and expanding our outreach, even when we cannot be physically present.
- Our partners are learning. Many indications show that they are adapting their regional projects to continue their implementation virtually. Indeed, there are some new gains here. Zoom, Skype, Facebook and all the social media platforms are making it easier for more people to resist the isolation of lockdown and find new ways of staying in touch. More people from more partners than ever before are now talking to each other more often, and building their projects in unison – electronically.

This is no time to downplay the opportunities of regional cooperation or retreat in the face of the pandemic. On the contrary, this is the time to demonstrate – and with increasing visibility – the need, the benefits and the opportunities of regional cooperation, even in the toughest of times. Positively surprised by the maturity, professionalism and dedication of our stakeholders, encouraged by their delightedness for the support we are providing in these difficult and un-precedent times, the Fund will continue implementing its mission and ensuring the sustainability of existing regional cooperation networks, so that the gains made are not lost or reversed.
Is the Western Balkans Fund a real step forward towards reconciliation?

/ By Jeremy Condor, Independent Management Consultant

Go to the Western Balkan Fund's website and you will see this on its homepage: ‘The Fund’s main objective is to boost cooperation between its members, to strengthen relations and regional cohesion, and to advance integration into the European Union.’

So, at the heart of the Western Balkans Fund’s ambitions and aspirations, the goal is reconciliation, writ large.

While this may seem like an ambitious and multifaceted goal in and of itself, there is a deeper and yet more ambitious intention here. Let’s add it up: what would we get if the peoples of the Western Balkans cooperate more effectively, if they enjoyed much stronger relationships, if they benefitted from regional cohesion at all levels and yet, if they became members of the EU? What is the sum total of these soaring ambitions? Many would call this ‘reconciliation’. So is this just Log frame-driven ambition, patching things up. Thus, reconciliation in this sense of the word, conflicting demands of external funders, or is it an organisation does not want as a partner not an owner, no way to demonstrate results. Here was a group of government professionals from across the region, who within a heartbeat of the start of the meeting were speaking openly, constructively, courageously and practically about their organisation and about the challenges the region – and the WBFF grapples with. The resulting strategy is a reflection of their commitment to work together.

And this was government. Not project-driven NGOs, not holding on to the public to demonstrate results. Here was a group of government professionals from across the region, who within a heartbeat of the start of the meeting were speaking openly, constructively, courageously and practically about their organisation and about the challenges the region – and the WBFF grapples with. The resulting strategy is a reflection of their commitment to work together.

As the member governments who were once bitterly opposed and who maintain very different narratives about what happened when relations were in the past and building the future on firm foundations. This is where we all agree on what got us into conflict in the first place. A tough call for people who were once bitterly opposed and who maintain very different narratives about what happened when relations were in the past and building the future on firm foundations. This is where we all agree on what got us into conflict in the first place. A tough call for people who were once bitterly opposed and who maintain very different narratives about what happened when relations were in the past and building the future on firm foundations.

To the cynic, perhaps all this sounds like development poesy – vague, aspirational and, in all likelihood – context-free. But here, in this context, the process is also the product. Indeed it is arguably more than the product: the apparent results of cross-boundary projects. Example: three organisations from across the Contracting Parties are funded to develop a common project, with a common goal. They have to design it together. They have to work together to deliver it. They have to deal with each other. They, and their stakeholders, share its benefits. The only way this is going to work is if they work in harmony, struggle in union with the obstacles and build the project together. Nobody gets to dominate. Nobody leads, nobody follows. No room here for gurus, no charismatic, no NGO findings’ syndrome getting in the way of collective endeavour. Success is determined by the results of true, cross-boundary, cross-cultural, cross-political team work. What these partners learn as they create and run the project together is as precious as any ostentatious project ‘result’. A region, working together is as precious as any ostentatious project ‘result’. A region, working together is as precious as any ostentatious project ‘result’. A region, working together is as precious as any ostentatious project ‘result’.

The only triumph here is a cross-boundary triumph of people who came together from across the region and beat the odds, proved that everyone can work together successfully and productively. And gradually the evidence of what works in regional cooperation is becoming more readily available. For sceptics, it will be increasingly important that the WBFF – can consciously demonstrate what works – with evidence to back up its case.

The way we work is who we are

In Volatile, post-conflict context, where populism, nationalism and nationalism are resilient, it can be as important to be clear about what an organisation does not want as much as declaring what it does want. This became apparent when the WBFF embarked on its strategic planning process. All fine and dandy to talk in inspirational terms about the glorious future and the beautiful vision of a reconciled region. But people are obliged to be much more focused and realistic when you also ask them what they do not want. For WBFF, that list is long, perpetual, unresolved conflict, economic decline, a region at a haemorrhage of young talent, ignoring the potential to learn from the past, the rewriting of history to perpetuate myths and untruths about each other, separation, lack of access to each other, political and social instability, vulnerability to conspiracy theories and foreign interference… the list goes on and on.

Is the Western Balkans Fund a real step forward towards reconciliation?

Your taxes at work

\- The Log frame is a methodology for identifying and prioritising results and activities, not a sophisticated international funding agency putting unwelcome pressure on regional governments to demonstrate a forced willingness to ‘cooperate’. No Log frame performance indicator boxes would be ticked in Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive and ambitious projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels. This strategy belongs to the region. So how would opponents of such progressive projects respond? In the west, usual suspects would be available – minimal foreign involvement, the EU and Washington or Brussels.
The concept of mobility was fundamentally intended to make people’s lives easier. Perhaps it was not accessible to everybody in the beginning, but many decades have passed since then and the world has changed profoundly. Mobility has slowly but surely become an ever more accessible and democratic value. There do remain certain population groups who continue to be neglected in this respect, but the elderly and people with disabilities deserve to have the ability to move or go for a ride at their heart’s desire. Toyota’s goal is to provide mobility for all.

In the year 2020, year of pandemic; all our arms, believes and actions since more proved this is the right direction. The society is changing. At the same time, the automotive industry is entering a once-in-a-century transformation and Toyota is ready for it. We are already steadily and progressively providing Connectivity and Mobility services, to offer ever better mobility for all. As our customers are changing, so are our solutions.

In 2020 we have launched KINTO. In markets where it can be viable and sustainable, adding mobility services to our traditional business model will allow us to respond to new customer needs and support cities and regions’ emerging mobility requirements (from individuals to corporate clients as well as cities). We aim to grow our vehicle and services to corporate and individual customers. In Toyota Adria we are very proud to be in preparation phase of launching this service in the very near future, being a role model for other European countries and cities.

Talk less, do more: helping the Society

In Slovenia the field of mobility of the elderly we joined the SOPOTNIKI project organized by the Institute of Intergenerational Collaboration. This way we started to change the state of loneliness and isolation of elders, who don’t have the luxury of transport. We believe that active participation is crucial for every elderly person and we are very proud to be taking part in encouraging independence and offer help, where needed. We are also aware of the fact that 170,000 people in Slovenia have various forms of physical disability and 9,100 Slovenians use wheelchairs. Toyota is the only car company in Slovenia to be associated with and work closely with the company that created the BDF: Handle. This co-operation brings the freedom of independent and safe driving to people who do not have the use of their legs but have fully or partially functional upper bodies. The handle is also the only product in Slovenia to be officially certified as appropriate and safe for use. Toyota is the only car brand in Slovenia to offer customers cars equipped with the “BDF: Handle” for test drives. In cooperation with AMZS, the Slovenian national automobile association, we also provide safe driving school services free of charge.

One of our greatest achievements in the field of rehabilitation and recovery is the collaboration between the Soča National Rehabilitation Institute, the University of Ljubljana, the Fujita University and Toyota Motor Corporation in the research and development of robotized rehabilitation devices. The commencement of this collaborative project was praised as a major paving stone for further cooperation between Slovenia and Japan. We also donated a vehicle to the Soča rehabilitation institute for the purpose of patients being able to practice getting in and out of vehicles after being discharged from the hospital.

For the third year now, we have been supporting the Heros in Pyjamas project together with Zavod Vozmar to raise awareness about safe driving, accident prevention and advocate zero tolerance for alcohol when driving. The project was recognized by the European Commission as the best road safety initiative in the EU in 2016 – 2019, winning the prestigious Jacques Barrot Grand Prize.

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic

In a time when the world is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic we focused especially on medical and emergency care. Toyota Adria provided its vehicles to medical staff and members of the Red Cross and other non-profit organisations, such as the Institute of Microbiology and Immunology, part of the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Medicine.

We have ordered a large quantity of equipment for medical personnel throughout Adria region, including protective masks, gloves and clothing from Japan with the aim of assisting in the efforts to stem the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We delivered the equipment to places where it was needed most in accordance with all applicable limitations and safety measures (in Slovenia to University Rehabilitation Institute of Slovenia – Soča, Institute of Oncology and national civil protection distribution centre in Roje).

We are actively contributing to create a society where everybody has the same mobility options.

No mobility, no life!

All these incentives, projects and commitments are Toyota’s way to contribute to ever better society at different levels - a society in which mobility is accessible to all while mass mobility is always considerate to nature, water resources, the environment and our common planet. By strengthening our partnerships and networks we are pursuing the motto “Together Stronger”. It guides the smallest steps we take with passion, honest hearts and a strong will. This is the reason we know our future will be bright.
Online skills and tools – a catalyst for economic comeback

Providing free tools and training to help with economic recovery.

/ By Matt Brittin, President, Google Europe, Middle East and Africa

Digital technology has changed our world but its benefits are too unevenly spread. As the world emerges from the initial coronavirus crisis, this matters more than ever.

During lockdown many of us did things we would never have thought possible from a distance. We saw friends and family, gathered round a screen. We studied in our kitchens and living rooms. We no longer went to work but work instead came to us. Online tools have been a lifeline. At least, that was true for the lucky ones among us. Those of us with access to the right technology were able to close the gap in space between us and the rest of the world.

In Greece, Kyriakos Nikolaidis and Kyriaki Hatzigeorgiou, coming from agricultural families, saw how hard it had become for employers in the sector to find workers. After attending a Google digital training, they built Agro-U, a mobile app for agricultural jobs. More than 3,000 people used the app to find work during lockdown. This was true long before coronavirus too. Digital technology has changed our world but its benefits are too unevenly spread. As the world emerges from the initial coronavirus crisis, this matters more than ever.

Recent research has shown that as economies begin to rebuild, the ones that are best placed to thrive are the ones that can embrace new technology. Online tools and skills will be a catalyst for the comeback.

Governments are also looking at this challenge. In “Europe’s Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation”, the European Commission described the need for a “digital transition” which they described as “even more important now than before the crisis started.” With some 60 million jobs said to be at risk across Europe today, we couldn’t agree more. This is the moment to ensure that as economies recover, opportunities are distributed fairly and that no one is denied the opportunity to thrive after coronavirus for lack of the right technology.

We have been working with governments, employers, and many more to put the power of digital technology in everyone’s hands and are now pledging to help 10 million people and businesses in Europe, the Middle East and Africa benefit from digital before the end of 2021. Firstly, we need to invest in people and their skills to achieve a sustainable, inclusive economic recovery. Five years ago, we saw many young people out of work and a digital skills shortage. So we launched Grow with Google with governments, after all, are the backbone of the European economy, accounting for 99% of all businesses and 85% of all new jobs on the continent.

Because of that, Google has provided $340 million worth of free advertising to SMBs across the world, $1 billion to support non-profits and we have made some of our most popular tools both more useful and accessible for small businesses. We made our premium video conferencing service, Google Meet, free for all to use. We made changes to tools like Search and Maps so that businesses could more easily update their customers about changes to their opening hours and other information, as well as making it easier to receive donations, sell gift cards and take orders online.

Now we are investing further to help businesses digitize faster, including access to free tools and capital for underserved businesses. Where they are not already online, we are helping them build a digital presence. Then, with tools Grow my Store and Google my Business, we are helping them find new customers online and we’ve added over 10 features to support businesses affected by COVID–19 since February.

Artificial intelligence (AI) also promises to be a great help. It offers the potential to transform how businesses reach new customers, how they increase their sales and how they become more efficient and profitable. That’s why we support the European Commission’s plans to channel recovery funding towards breakthrough digital technologies like AI. It is why we are now accelerating the launch of our own “AI for Business” tool: a new checkout tool which provides businesses with a customizable report laying out the best applications of AI for them and practical suggestions on how to implement changes.

We remain fundamentally optimistic about the future - about the role technology will have to help people, businesses and communities recover. Online tools have been a lifeline for people and businesses in lockdown and those tools can help people learn new skills and find new jobs. But as our economies begin its recovery from coronavirus, the responsibility to ensure we can all thrive is shared. Governments, businesses and individuals must work together to help everyone benefit.
Mainstreaming the circular economy mindset

The 5th Circular Change Conference - in partnership with Bled Strategic Forum and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia - is focused on key European and Slovenian achievements of the systemic circular transition, as well as on challenges caused by COVID-crisis, calling for the radical shift in the mindset.

/ By Ladeja Godina Košir, Founder & Director, Circular Change; Chair of the Coordination Group, European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform

The Circular Change Conference is one of the key European meeting points of circular economy changemakers. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its 5th edition has been transformed into a “virtual roadshow” that consists of 5 events and 5 partnerships.

The collaboration with Bled Strategic Forum is the result of joined ambition to engage the whole spectrum of different stakeholders and stress the importance of systemic, transdisciplinary and inclusive approach in the process of rethinking the economy and society of the future. We are putting forward security (in terms of healthcare) and economic recovery (in terms of green recovery).

Shifting the mindset and embracing the change

Through the entire Circular Change Conference, we are exploring the mindset — how to rethink our values and redefine our patterns, definitions, metrics, habits, and decision making processes. Addressing SDG’s, European Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan as well as the Green Recovery interventions. We are bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches, introducing circular measures taken by governments as well as circular initiatives launched by citizens.

Slovenia has adopted the EIT Climate-KIC Circular, Regenerative Economies Deep Demonstration program with the ambition to showcase an increase in visibility as a circular economy leader with progressive and innovative community events designed to bring stakeholders together, ensure the dissemination of results and put the country on the international circular economy map. Great content also for the upcoming Slovenian EU Presidency in 2021. So, plenty of reasons to join us!

Sustainable leadership by taking bold actions

Scotland’s circular journey, COP26 and why collaboration is key to bringing the lasting global change needed to overcome the climate crisis

/ By Iain Gulland, Chief Executive, Zero Waste Scotland

‘What will you remember when you return home? That question was posed in the last edition of the Bled Strategic Times by one Slovenian minister seeking to remind delegates of the economic and environmental benefits of doing business with this small pioneering nation. No one’s going to ask that this year because, unfortunately, not many of us are going to succeed, we all need to collaborate to forge a circular economy which works locally, nationally and globally. In Scotland we’re starting from a position of relative strength.

Scotland’s circular front-runners

Zero Waste Scotland has been leading our nation’s circular journey since 2014 providing financial support and expert advice from our experienced, expanding and increasingly diverse circular economy team. We have helped more than 200 Scottish companies find inventive ways of designing, producing and consuming things differently.

In theory a circular economy means ‘Making things last’ by reducing, reusing, repairing, remaking and finally recycling to keep limited natural resources in a ‘loop’ as long as possible. In reality, it means a growing network of entrepreneurs developing successful commercial businesses across Scotland.

One of the most inventive companies we have worked with is CeluCamp in Fife, which extracts tiny cellulose fibres (nanocellulose) from root vegetables to make everything from paint and concrete to cosmetics. Another is Revive Eco, a Glasgow firm turning waste coffee grounds into fertiliser. They are also working on a sustainable alternative to palm oil which could save millions of tonnes of carbon emissions each year. Fellow Glasgow innovators, EGG Lighting, are among the circular companies reaping the rewards of switching from selling products to providing products as services, including longer-lasting relationships with customers which provide a competitive edge.

Since 2016, progress has been supported through the Scottish Government’s first-ever circular economy strategy, entitled Making Things Last. The circular economy now supports nearly one in ten Scottish jobs. This headline figure comes from the first-ever national assessment.
of circular economy jobs and skills across Scotland, which we carried out with the Dutch organisation, Circle Economy.

This is another example of valuable collaboration to obtain the data we need to measure and drive progress. One in ten jobs is significant, but we need to score ten out of ten. Our forthcoming report also identifies key gaps and opportunities in existing roles and skills in three key sectors - construction, capital projects including decommissioning of oil rigs and wind turbines, and the bioeconomy.

Shortages of PPE during lockdown highlighted both the inventiveness and resilience of businesses in Scotland and elsewhere, but also worrying gaps in supply chains and knowledge. It was great to see our distillers and brewers moving fast from making whisky and beer to hand sanitiser to restore a manufacturing industry in a new, sustainable way, however. We have already the world’s third green electricity grid which can power SEM. But the fact that they had to do that was telling.

Like many developed nations, our economy is dominated by the service sector. Scotland is well placed to restore a manufacturing industry in a new, sustainable way. However, we already have the world’s third greenest electricity grid which can power the green recovery.

Like Slovenia, Scotland is also famous for its spectacular scenery. Ben Nevis is the highest Scottish peak, with thousands of people reaching the summit each year. Few will know that it is dwarfed by the scale of waste from goods like mattresses which are often flytipped around the country. We worked out that if you stacked up all the mattresses thrown out nationwide in a single year, they would create a mountain of waste which would tower over Ben Nevis (at over 100 times higher). They would even dwarf Everest, the world’s highest peak (at 17 times its height).

Circular collaboration

Here again, we are making progress through collaboration and circular thinking. A new partnership with the UK’s National Bed Federation is driving change to reduce that waste. The Federation worked with us on newly published guidance setting out how companies can design more sustainable mattresses which last longer and are easier to recycle at end-of-life.

Internationally, we already have a strong relationship with Slovenia. We’ve worked closely with conference host Circular Change, whose chief executive and founder, Ladeja Godina Košir, is a good friend of mine. In 2018 Circular Change worked with a range of partners on a road map setting out a sustainable future for Slovenia. This will be a vital guide to help steer a course towards European sustainability through the circular economy as Slovenia prepares to take up the European Council presidency in 2021.

Meanwhile at Zero Waste Scotland we are about to launch a new road map of our own ahead of COP26. Glasgow will now host the landmark global climate change summit in 2021, after it was postponed due to lockdown. We have no time to waste. While Covid-19 suddenly became the most urgent threat short-term, the climate crisis is still the greatest challenge of all our lifetimes.

Scotland can do far more than just host COP26 – we can show leadership by taking bold action on reducing all our emissions further and faster. Our new plan includes aims to build on the evidence and policy changes we have produced so far to ensure we meet our Paris Agreement commitments.

In 2011 we published our world-leading Carbon Metric which allowed us to measure for the first time the impact of our consumption and emissions by nearly 75 per cent. We all need to keep doing things differently. It was a bold decision and a vital one for us to make progress as an authentic organisation leading the fight to end the climate crisis. I will also be urging staff to carry on attending meetings and events like the billed circular change conference virtually from now on.

We need to stop wasting our planet’s limited natural resources and start living within our means. The successful sustainable future of Scotland, and the wider world, depends on urgent and permanent change. We can’t afford to go back.

Being the change

As an organisation, like most service industry businesses, Zero Waste Scotland’s emissions come largely from staff travel. We already knew pre-lockdown that the greatest cause of our carbon emissions by far was commuting. In 2018/19 alone we estimate that our staff commuted over a million miles. During lockdown we crunched the numbers and estimated that continuing with homeworking could cut our emissions by nearly 75 per cent.

I have recently urged all staff to take up the offer we are now making to all employees to move to homeworking permanently if they want to. It’s a bold decision and a vital one for us to make progress as an authentic organisation leading the fight to end the climate crisis. I will also be urging staff to carry on attending meetings and events like the billed circular change conference virtually from now on.

We all need to stop wasting our planet’s limited natural resources and start living within our means. The successful sustainable future of Scotland, and the wider world, depends on urgent and permanent change. We can’t afford to go back.

Zero Waste Scotland chief executive Iain Gulland’s advice to Slovenia as it prepares to take up the European Council presidency in 2021.

Collaboration and information sharing will be key to Slovenia’s success in leading the European Union to the sustainable future every nation needs to overcome COVID-19 and the climate crisis.

Like Scotland, Slovenia was on the right path before lockdown thanks to the road map Circular Change produced with partners in 2018 to turn circular economy theory into reality so we all live within our environmental and economic means.

To create the new circular jobs and businesses we now need more urgently than ever, nations must work together, identifying existing and emerging roles and skills, and increasing financial incentives to scale up the circular economy throughout Europe and beyond.

We all need to keep doing things differently.
The sweet spot of the energy transition – when green and digital go hand in hand

Decarbonization – we can do it! But are we reaching for the goal or wasting valuable time due to lack of synergy and poor understanding of potential? The future is always overpredicted, but underestimated! Let’s not wait any longer.

/ By Mojca Markizeti, Head of Regulatory Affairs and Sustainability, Iskraemeco

I’m writing this reflection during my summer vacations, spending time with my family, hiking through the national parks of Slovenia, Czechia and Poland, rowing down beautiful rivers, climbing some rocky walls, paddling across deep green lakes, running along vast stretches of the Polish Baltic coast and driving vast meadows of unimaginable color palettes and endless wheat fields. The beauty that is all around calms me down and teaches me. Have you noticed how nature and ecosystems always adapt in order to survive? Synergy, flexibility and agility enable animals and plants to thrive in practically any environment. Although we are prone to forgetting that fact, humans are part of nature, and Homo sapiens, as well as all the systems that it has created, has the tendency to adjust, survive, and thrive in its DNA. It is a fact that the future is always overpredicted, but underestimated.

We live in historical times and our actions taken in the next few years will significantly benefit or harm the future of this planet’s population. I’m talking about our reaction to the climate crisis. We know what the right answer is: we need to switch to a circular economy, embed smart designs, promote smart use and exploit all the benefits of digitalization and intelligent energy systems. We have the technology and have developed new business models; however, the progress and results we need so badly are still out of reach. In the next few paragraphs, I will attempt to share my perspective on the issue and explain where the potential truly lies. How do we move forward and how can the EU really meet the goals of the Green Deal and be a role model for the world regions? For now, we – the multi-stakeholder economies, societies and governments – are using resources we do not have and creating a footprint the planet cannot nullify. We are turning to consultants, experts and analysts to provide us with guidelines and predictions for the future. However, we repeatedly look away, because we don’t like what we see in the mirror and because we don’t like the hard work that it would take to get there. We choose to ignore the obvious and continue searching for shortcuts. There will be a high price to pay globally if we continue on this track. The one thing we can, and must, learn from this terrible coronavirus situation is that every crisis comes in stages: reaction, adaptation and reorientation. The climate crisis is no different.

For more than 20 years, I’ve been working on sustainability and circular economy strategies, and for the last five years I’ve been helping Iskraemeco, a global company committed to ‘bringing intelligence to energy’, to embed the principles of sustainability and circularity into its strategy, business models and solutions for its customers. Therefore, this text is also a tribute to a company that is recognized as a trend-setter in this field and has done much in terms of consulting partners and governments on the pressing issues, but has also failed in many attempts, mainly as a result of poor policymaking and insufficient legislation, understanding and commitment to the green transition.

What do we need to do and how fast do we need to do it?

Our planet’s average temperature has already increased by 1 °C and the world is currently not on track to achieve the Paris Agreement objectives of containing temperature change at below 2 °C, let alone 1.5 °C. This is the consequence of the CO2 footprint that we have managed to push to very high levels. We need to decarbonize the planet and we need to do it fast. The CO2 footprint has the biggest correlation with energy demand. Energy production and consumption represent more than 75% of the EU’s greenhouse gas emissions. To achieve climate neutrality by 2050, this will need to change profoundly. On a global scale, energy consumption is growing annually, and so is the CO2 footprint. The EU has taken on a global leadership role in tackling climate change and actively pursues policies to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and to decouple these from economic growth, which is commendable. However, in recent times, the EU has set itself rather unambitious goals, namely to increase renewable energy by 20%, decrease its CO2 footprint by 20%, and to improve energy efficiency by 20%, and has even failed to reach the last one. As we speak, the EU has already adopted climate and energy legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Furthermore, the Commission has adopted the Green Deal and Green Recovery plans in an attempt to increase the EU’s 2030 target for greenhouse gas emission reductions to at least -90% and towards -95% compared to 1990 levels. The question I would like to be considered is: can we raise the bar even higher?

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have promoted on a global scale has been switching to renewable energy and limiting the use of fossil fuels. Yes, this is needed and we must continue along this track but, given the pace of global development, predictions that energy consumption will increase by up to 50%, according to certain sources, and awareness that as much as 75% of emissions come from energy production and consumption, it becomes pretty obvious that energy efficiency is the key to resolving the climate crisis.

The energy sector has pledged to play a leading role in investments that are essential in becoming carbon-neutral well before 2050. That being said, the underlying question remains: how will it happen? These challenges do not date from yesterday and it has been switching to renewable energy and, limiting the use of fossil fuels. The world has done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consumption based on data from meters. There are only a few countries in Europe that have done that, but only one has made it mandatory – the UK. In many mass-plot projects over the years the UK has proven that end users can achieve a 5% decrease in energy consum...
The sustainable road ahead

Investing into the future of Central and Eastern Europe by supporting the circularity and sustainability of bioresources.

/ By Dr Barna Kovacs, Secretary General, BIOEAST Initiative; Counsellor, Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union

The leading role of the European Union in initiating debate on bioeconomy and circular economy has a history of more than ten years. The EU member states gradually took up the fil rouge and started to develop policies at the national level, through intense political discussions on the proposed strategies, directives, policies and action plans. Today the proposed strategies, directives, policies and action plans. Today the European Commission furthered this history of more than ten years. The concepts. However, the correct implementation of these EU guidelines and the success of the new national policies proposed on this basis will depend on the exact understanding of the differences between these concepts. Thus, the public administrations preparing the policies and political decisions have a key role to play in the adequate interpretation of these general policy lines, in consulting with stakeholders and in ensuring their smooth deployment on the ground. Today it is clear that it is important for these countries to internalise the underlying principle that the circular economy is not complete without the bioeconomy and vice versa.

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we are facing a sustainability transformation, which will happen with or without the active involvement of policy makers. The countries that are late stepping into this process will lose competitiveness and resilience. Circular economy goes hand in hand with bioeconomy. Currently all the CEE member states have started their national level discussions on circular and bioeconomies. It remains to be seen whether the public administrations will be successful in proposing national action plans on sustainable and circular bioeconomy. In addition, there is a new economy on the cusp of a breakthrough - the CO2 economy. In this vein, the bioeconomy, circular and CO2 economy could realize the objective of a more sustainable and resource-efficient world with a low carbon footprint.

In addressing this challenge, it is important for these countries to internalise the underlying principle that the circular economy is not complete without the bioeconomy and vice versa. This is difficult in their actual context of barely having started implementing measures in circular economy and still discussing the sustainable bioeconomy concept. Moreover, circular economy provides only a framework, a mere economic space, where the value of resources, materials and products is maintained for as long as possible while minimising the generation of waste. Thus, the bio-based economy as much as the fossil, mineral, metal and renewable carbon-based economies are not integral parts of the circular economy and will probably never be fully included into it. One of the most important principles of the sustainable bioeconomy is circularity, however, not all its parts are circular and sustainable per definition. It is not the subject of this article to elaborate on this further but there are good examples for recent discussions on the differences.

Investing in research and innovation

Continuing on the importance of the engagement from the public administrations it is important to emphasize the role of knowledge-based policymaking. The sustainable transformation of our societies is unimaginable without a heavy investment into research and innovation. Thus, the most important driver of our competitive and resilient future is education, research and innovation. The BIOEAST initiative is a governmental level platform helping 11 CEE countries to develop knowledge-based, sustainable and circular bioeconomies. The BIOEAST members are low or moderate innovator countries. Their national investment into research and innovation is at a low level (corresponding to less than 2% of the national GDP); however, the successful transition to sustainable societies should be facilitated by these investments. The different policies require a strong system

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Individual earnings impact on environmental awareness

The possible solutions to current problems are brought by the research and implemented via policies by the public administration, but the decision on the step forward is taken at the political level. This context is important to see that an enormous societal pressure challenges the political decision-making process. More precisely, the society’s understanding of policymaking processes is key for their successful implementation. Presently there are big differences in how politics factor in societal reactions. There are also traps to avoid. For instance, talking about developed and developing countries in terms of their preparedness for transformation leads to a clear misunderstanding. Most Western countries are considered developed economies and the CEE countries fall into this category. However, the fact is that there are different layers of national societies with different levels of annual earnings. Everyday life often translates to struggles for many families. And this impacts on how much an individual can even deal with different aspects of a sustainable future (environmental, socio-economic), which are key for global sustainability. Authors of the book Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think are dividing the global population into four categories based on earnings. The fourth, and highest category includes those who earn more than 30 euro per day, 10,000 euro per year. These are the ones who also consider the environment besides their everyday life. When analysing the median annual earnings of the BIOEAST countries population from this angle, we might find some similarities, and surprisingly only a few of them have half of their population (median) earning more than 30 euro per day.7 The median salary for more than half of the BIOEAST countries’ population is just a little bit above 5000 euro per year. Without far-reaching conclusions, it should at least be stated that an influential part of the electorates in these countries is struggling with every day personal and familiar issues, not having capacity for more complex concerns, which may influence their broader environment. The responsibility of the political level is therefore high and clearly challenged.

Importance of responsible policy-making

Taking the example of Slovenia, one of the few BIOEAST countries, where the median annual earnings since 2014 are higher than 10,000 euro. This clearly illustrates wider room for manoeuvre for political decisions. Results are visible, with steps already taken towards a sustainable and greener future. However, Slovenia is one of the countries, which are in the group of moderate innovators among the EU member states. Investing more into research and innovation with the help of the BIOEAST Initiative could open the door for an improved participation in the excellent based science, in an enhanced use of EU Research and Innovation framework programme, Horizon Europe. This might also pave the way for developing overarching circular and bioeconomy strategies and knowledge-based policies. Overall, the BIOEAST countries should rebuild their cooperation in the field of circular and sustainable bioeconomy research. The use of biomass, including waste streams, gives new opportunities for these countries, which cannot be fully exploited without cooperation at macro-regional and European levels. To unlock this potential, the BIOEAST macro-region needs a vision, a strategic research and innovation agenda. Thus, there is a need for foresight, which shall look into the future perspectives of the macro-region’s bioeconomies (2030 - 2050) and at the same time setting it in the wider EU and global context, investigating the special characteristics of the macro-regional bioeconomy deployment, special needs and strengths. The BIOEAST foresight exercise could benefit the public sector as a whole, and especially researchers, policy makers and politicians, responsible for defining the future evolution of the private sector, thus shaping the CEE societies. The upcoming Slovenian EU Presidency could show a path for all the countries in this macro-region towards a sustainable green future with a developed strategic thinking on circular and sustainable production and use of bioresources.
Shaping the Slovenian circular economy mindset

From mapping to action - orchestrators of a circular, regenerative and low-carbon economy in Slovenia.

/ An interview with the founder of Circular Change Ladeja Godina Košir and leader of EIT Climate-KIC’s project in Slovenia Cliona Howie del Río, conducted by Circular Change.

Q: Mrs. Godina Košir and Mrs. Howie del Río, can you share with us how you see Slovenia in the process of transition to circular economy? Can you compare Slovenian status of circularity to some other EU countries?

Ladeja: In my opinion, Slovenia is off to a good start. In 2017 Vision 2050 and Strategy 2030 were unveiled, which restated the importance of embedding circular economy and sustainability into the policy agenda. Another milestone was the Roadmap towards the circular economy in Slovenia presented in May 2018. After that we expected the government to introduce a concrete CE Action plan, but unfortunately that wasn’t the case.

While Mrs. Howie del Río has been focusing on Slovenia’s transition since the Slovenian parliament passed a motion to adopt an EIT Climate-KIC-led proposal called “A Deep Demonstration of a Circular, Regenerative and Low-Carbon Economy in Slovenia” at the end of 2019. Both can share some “external insights” on Slovenian’s circular economy mindset as well as on the readiness for “green recovery” in these post-pandemic times.

Cliona: Slovenia has identified circular economy as a strategic development priority to ensure a prosperous future and high quality of life for Slovenian citizens. With a clear aim to become a fully circular economy, much has been achieved on a strategic level—the transition to a circular economy is included in key national documents and strategies, such as the Vision for Slovenia in 2050 and the Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, the Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan. The Slovenian Circular Economy Roadmap presents a further important step, paving the way for the transition from a linear to a circular economy.

But this is obviously not enough. Business as usual is not delivering the pace and scale of change needed. Material consumption is still very high, as are the volumes of waste despite efficient management. Systemic change with deliberate action integrating all stakeholders is thus essential if Slovenia is to achieve its ambitious goal of becoming a regional leader of the transition into a circular economy.

Finland and the Netherlands often serve as model countries when it comes to circular economy, with many other EU countries following in their steps and developing circular economy strategies. Others rely on grassroots circular economy initiatives.
Q: We know that transition to circular economy-based society is complex and it demands a systemic and holistic approach with new forms of cooperation and co-creation and wide inclusion of stakeholders. Do you believe Slovenia is ready for such an approach?

Ladeja: During the Slovenian road-mapping process, we were actively engaged in the governmental group ‘Partner for green economy’ (under the sponsorship of the Prime Minister). At that time Slovenia showed readiness for intersectoral cooperation among ministries as well as for the collaboration with other stakeholders. It was a great “exercise” but unfortunately with the change of the government in 2018 this initiative did not continue. We often say, that with the population of 2,000,000, Slovenia is a country “of just the right size” for working on the ground, implementing the so-called “bottom-up” approach. We had great experiences with stakeholders’ engagement during the road-mapping process and we have learned how important it is to orchestrate them and communicate with them openly and transparently.

Cliona: Slovenia is ready – and its commitment to embracing an unprecedented cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary and coordinated nation-wide approach to decarbonise the country through the transition to a circular economy proves that. There are excellent institutions and communities ready to play a key role in taking forward the country’s vision to become a circular economy leader. Numerous projects, case studies, stories and lessons learnt have been achieved, but now Slovenia needs to move beyond single-point intervention and aim for a systemic transition to achieve greater impact. As an agile and forward-looking country, Slovenia’s commitment and hard work one the ground has been extraordinary and thus my expectations for the country’s success in securing an important and unique role in the international circular economy map are very high.

Q: Mrs. Howie del Rio, you are currently working on Slovenia on a project called “A Deep Demonstration of a Circular, Regenerative and Low-Carbon Economy in Slovenia”. Can you shortly describe its purpose and how will it contribute to the systemic transition of Slovenia?

Cliona: Since the beginning of 2018 we have been working with the Government of Slovenia on a deep demonstration of rapid change to a circular and regenerative economy and society. Well, over the course of 2 years, we have been working with three governments, which proves the importance, timeliness and overarching nature of our collaboration, which crosses political divides. With 9 ministries involved (which we hear is unprecedented), we have co-designed a programme for national circular economy transition that will result in 200 local communities engaged, 11 cities involved, 800 students & school staff trained, 1500 companies, including SMEs and start-ups, receiving tailored advisory services and 12 Circular Economy regional action plans developed. What is important is that we are not reinventing the wheel. All activities are designed to enhance or build on already existing collaborations, initiatives, networks. It is the systemic approach engaging multiple programmes simultaneously, and with one another, that is novel. The Deep Demonstration will provide an overarching programme with concrete actions that will facilitate Slovenia’s transition from a linear to a circular economy, learning from the frontrunners and adapting to the local environment and needs.

Q: How did you choose the main areas Slovenia should be working on globally to transit to circular economy?

Ladeja: Selected areas were chosen based on the potential they have for circular transformation. They are the first framework – areas, where the circular champions have been recognised. However, it is crucial to connect these main areas with others on a systemic basis. None of these areas should be a silo trapped in its own feeling of greatness.

With this notion we have defined four priority areas in the Slovenian Roadmap: food system, forest-based value chains, manufacturing and mobility. They were chosen based on our field work, available data and experiences shared by comparable countries.

Cliona: The focus areas have previously been identified by Slovenia as priorities where there is either a drain of resources or large potential for carbon emissions reductions. Emissions and waste from fossil systems are a global problem, just as the overuse and limited circularity of forestry products are critical in the context of climate change. It also doesn’t come as a surprise that mobility is both a major source of emissions environmentally and particularly in Slovenia, where alternative fuels and Mobility-as-a-Service megatrends have the potential to shape a more sustainable mobility future. Manufacturing as a focus area is cross-cutting and holds many of the keys for multiple value chains to become circular and low-carbon. In the Deep Demonstration, and additional emphasis was placed on buildings and construction – this conveniently already has overlaps with manufacturing and forest-based value chains, both in terms of how we make and reuse buildings and their construction materials. Calls for proposals across the five value chains will be designed to plot innovatively solutions that embrace the concepts of circularity, demonstrate promising new ways to, and facilitate transitions towards carbon neutral value chains.

Q: Two of the core driving forces for the circular transition are circularised innovation. How can we foster creativity and innovation in Slovenia? What has already been done and what more can be challenged?

Ladeja: Creativity and innovation are the driving forces of change. While integrating the “circular triangle” as the core of the Slovene Road-mapping principle back in 2018, we have highlighted circular culture as one of three components of the triangle (next to circular economy and circular change). When talking about circular culture, we are talking about the need to bring creative industries into the strategic decision-making processes. By engaging creative industries, we can design so much needed new, creative, out-of-the-box solutions. As an example, in 2019 we launched the design competition Creative & the Design Centre for Creativity and we got some excellent applications, some projects were introduced in Brussels during the ECESSP Conference as well. Donar d.o.o. a Slovenian company specialised in design furniture, uses the “Cradle-to-cradle” principle that upcycles their products at the end of their life, they have introduced their circular business model in Brusel and gained a lot of interest of international investors. That is what counts!

Q: What results can Slovenia show from project during the EU Council presidency in 2021 since the circular economy will be one of the key functions of Slovenian presidency?

Cliona: Slovenia will put on the European circular economy map, by supporting the country’s vision to become a regional hub for circular economy through concrete action at the systemic transition. It will provide an example of an unprecedented systemic effort on national level to help meet climate targets for other countries and regions to follow. The Deep Demonstration will show that Slovenia is not just making circular economy transition but works actively with all relevant stakeholders to make it a reality.
ON-SITE SESSIONS
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8.00–9.30 Combo AmCham Business Breakfast: Collaboration Between Businesses, States, Civil Society and Academia as the Response to the New Normal @Rikli Balance Hotel, Arnold Hall
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Chaired by Mr Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum

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Mr Richard Harknett, Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Cincinnati, Co-director of the Ohio Cyber Range Institute, and Chair of the Center for Cyber Strategy and Policy.

Mr Casper Klynge, Vice-President for European Affairs, Microsoft.

Mr Juhan Lepassaar, Director, National Cyber and Information Security Authority (NLRA), Czech Republic.

Mr Arne Schönbohm, President, Federal Office for Information Security (BSI).


Ms Kaja Ciglič, Senior Director, Digital Diplomacy, Microsoft.

Dr Uroš Svete, Director, Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (ISA).

19.00–19.15 Closing Remarks
@Rikli Balance Hotel, Arnold Hall

Mr Tone Kajzer, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

14.00–16.30 The 5th Circular Change Conference: Stewarding Sustainability Transformations in Slovenia
In partnership with Circular Change.

14.00–14.30 Welcome remarks
Video address by Mr Tone Kajzer, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr Andrej Uzjan, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia.

Ms Ladeja Godina Košir, Chair, ECESP, and Founder of Circular Change.

14.30–15.15 Plenary Session 1: An insight into EU green & circular recovery/ followed by Q&A

Mr Freek van Eijk, Managing Director, Holland Circular Hotspot.

Mr Iain Gulland, Chief Executive, Zero Waste Scotland.

Mr Barna Kovacs PhD, Secretary-General, BIOEAST Initiative.

15.15–16.00 Plenary Session 2 Stewarding Sustainability Transformations in Slovenia / followed by Q&A

Ms Cliona Howie, Head, Circular Economy Climate KIC.

Ms Janja Kreitmayer McKenzie, Senior policy advisor, Ministry for the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia.

Ms Mojca Markizeti, Sustainability Manager, Iskraemeco.

Mr Gregor Skender, Manager, Deloitte Slovenia.

16.00–16.30 Open Discussion & Session Highlights

16.00–17.30 City Diplomacy and the Future of Multilateralism
In partnership with Global Diplomacy Lab.

Mayors and local leaders increasingly connect across borders to coordinate their efforts, advocacy and response to global challenges, such as climate change, inequalities, migration and the COVID-19 pandemic. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, this session will explore the implications of the growing role of cities on the multilateral space. A panel with a diplomat, a city official and a leader from the civil society will be followed by breakout rooms where participants will discuss the links between the local and international governance levels.

COVID-19 Precautions
TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND PROTECT OTHERS.

Wear a face mask in all enclosed public spaces.

Wash your hands or use a hand sanitiser regularly.

Keep the required safety distance of at least 1.5 meters.
Speaker Biographies

Mr. Igor Cesarec
Research Economist, Citigroup. Dr Cesarec is vice-president of the Academic Council of the Eastern Mediterranean University and is based in New York. Prior to working for Citigroup, he worked at the US bank Morgan Stanley in London, specializing in money and bond markets. He has been a researcher at organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the National Bureau of Economic Research and Harvard University. Dr Cesarec holds a PhD in economics from the New York University, and a Master’s degree in econometrics and mathematical economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Mr. Jan Bervar
Jan Bervar is a group security architect with Concise Group and NEL, Ltd. responsible for cyber-security analysis and security solution development, as well as security evangelism in times of technological or business changes. His 25-year experience revolves around cyber-risk management solutions for mostly financial and government sectors, where he strongly advocates a “yes” approach to security.

Mr. Joseph Philipaz
Senior Director, Amber Infrastructure. Mr Philipaz joined Amber Infrastructure in February 2020 with a wealth of experience in the management of regulated financial services businesses, having held senior regulatory positions, most recently as part of the team at Dalmore Capital Limited that successfully completed the financing of the Thames Tideway Tunnel and its recent acquisitions of Interests in National Grid Gas Distribution, Anglian Water and EDF’s UK wind farms.

Mr. Igor Zgragdžič
Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager for Central and Eastern Europe at Google. His previous positions include Secretary-General of the Foreign Investors Council in Croatia and Secretary-General of the Croatian-Korean Business Club. Mr Zgragdžič holds a Master’s degree in Economics and Business from the University of Zagreb and a Master’s degree in Public Administration from Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government.

Mr. Jure Leskovec
Researcher at Pinterest and Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He graduated from the Faculty of Law in Belgrade.

H.E. Mr. Giuseppe Conte
President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic. After graduating from secondary school in classical studies, he obtained a law degree magna cum laude from the Sapienza University in Rome. Mr Conte has undertaken research work for many years both in Italy and abroad. In 2002, he qualified as Professor of Private Law and was assigned the Chairs of Private Law and Civil Law at the Law School of the University of Florence. He is co-editor of several legal journals and series and has practiced as a lawyer with several law firms.

H.E. Mr. Johannes Hahn
President of the European Commission. He was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany and has received the European Union’s silver medal in 2016. Mr Hahn received an award as the Minister of Finance for the years 2014 and 2017. He has been awarded the title of Companion of the Order of the British Empire. Mr Hahn has been awarded the title of Companion of the Order of the British Empire.

H.E. Mr. Aleksandar Vučić
President of the Republic of Serbia as of 2017. Previously, he served as the Prime Minister of Serbia 2014–2016 and Minister of Defense and the First Deputy Prime Minister, in 2012. As of September 2013, he held the position of the First Deputy Prime Minister, in charge of fighting crime and corruption. He graduated from the University of Economics in Bratislava.

Mr. Jonathan Moore
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs at the US Department of State. Most recently, he was Principal Deputy Secretary and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. Previously, he served as Ambassador and Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Igor Zgragdžič, Mr. Jure Leskovec, Mr. Jure Leskovec, Mr. Johannes Hahn, H.E. Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, H.E. Mr. Giuseppe Conte, and Mr. Jonathan Moore were all invited to participate in the Keynote address by H.E. Mr. Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr. Zgragdžič serves as member of the European Parliament and served as President of the National Assembly and as Prime Minister of Slovenia. In the 2012 presidential ballot, he became the fourth elected President of Slovenia by winning the support of 67.37 per cent of voters. In 2017 he was re-elected for a second term.

Chair by Mr. Peter Grk
Secretary-General of the Bled Strategic Forum and Western Balkans Coordinator at the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, he chaired the Committee on the Civilian Aspect of Crisis Management in Brussels and was Advisor to the Foreign Minister and Chief Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister. He holds a degree in political science.

Moderated by Ms. Alja Vodnik
Chief Executive Officer, AmCham Slovenia. Ms. Vodnik worked in the media for 14 years, launching a new Slovenian TV station when she was only 29. After five successful years, she sold her stake in the company and left the media. Ms Vodnik holds a Master’s degree in communication. She is currently heading the American Chamber of Commerce in Slovenia - AmCham Slovenia. She has been elected Vice-Chair of AmChams in Europe, the umbrella organization representing 45 AmChams from 43 Eurasian countries.

Welcome address by H.E. Mr. Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia. Dr Logar is a PhD of Advanced Social Studies. He assumed position of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia in March 2020. In years 2014–2018 he was Deputy in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. In 2004–2008 and 2012–2013 he was a Director of the Government Communication Office. Previously in 2008 he was a Spokesperson of the Slovenian EU Council Presidency. The then Lithuanian President Awarded him with “Life Saving Cross” for saving a Lithuanian citizen from drowning in one of Hungary’s lakes.

Keynote address by H.E. Mr Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia. During his long political career, he was member of the European Parliament and served as President of the National Assembly and as Prime Minister of Slovenia. In the 2012 presidential ballot, he became the fourth elected President of Slovenia by winning the support of 67.37 per cent of voters. In 2017 he was re-elected for a second term.

Opening

Panel: Europe after Brexit and COVID-19

Video address by Mr. Thomas Bach
President of the International Olympic Committee since September 2013. Dr Bach is a lawyer by profession and has had a successful career in sports both on and off the field of play. He became an Olympic champion in 1976 winning a gold medal in fencing (team foil) at Montreal Games. In 2006, he was named Founding President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB).

H.E. Mr. Aleksandar Vučić
President of the Republic of Serbia as of 2017. Previously, he served as the Prime Minister of Serbia 2014–2016 and Minister of Defense and the First Deputy Prime Minister, in 2012. As of September 2013, he held the position of the First Deputy Prime Minister, in charge of fighting crime and corruption. He graduated from the University of Law in Belgrade.

H.E. Mr. And j e Babiš
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. He started his political career as Minister of Finance between 2014 and 2017. In 2016, Andrej Babiš received an award as the Minister of Finance of the Year for the area of developing European economies. Mr Babiš has rich managerial experiences, notably because of his founding of Agrofert in 1993, which is currently the largest Czech agricultural, food and chemical holding. He graduated from the University of Economics in Bratislava.

H.E. Mr. Giuseppe Conte
President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic. After graduating from secondary school in classical studies, he obtained a law degree magna cum laude from the Sapienza University in Rome. Mr Conte has undertaken research work for many years both in Italy and abroad. In 2002, he qualified as Professor of Private Law and was assigned the Chairs of Private Law and Civil Law at the Law School of the University of Florence. He is co-editor of several legal journals and series and has practised as a lawyer with several law firms.
Moderated by Dr Nik Georgiev
International Broadcaster and Visiting Professor, King's College, United Kingdom. Between 1996 and 2014, he was one of the main news presenters for the BBC's international 24-hour news channel BBC World News. He presented The Hub with Nik Georgiev, BBC World Debate, Dateline London, and locally covered major global stories. Mr Georgiev co-authored the initial findings of the "Thinking the Unthinkable" study to wide acclaim and was awarded Honorary Doctorates by Exeter University and Bristol University.

H.E. Dr Bogdan Lucian Aurescu
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania. Dr Aurescu is a career diplomat holding the rank of ambassador. A renowned university professor and expert on international law, he is currently a member of the UN International Law Commission. During his diplomatic career, he served as Presidential Adviser for Foreign Policy to the President of Romania (2016-2019) after his first mandate as Foreign Minister (2014-2015).

H.E. Mr Joseph Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. He previously served as Secretary General of the Federal Foreign Office, and was President of the European Parliament (2004-2009) period. Initially trained as an aeronautical engineer and economist before entering into politics, he also held several positions in the Spanish Government from 1984 to 1996, was President of the European University Institute (EUI) and held the Jean Monnet Chair in European Economic Integration at the Complutense University of Madrid (2013-2016).

H.E. Dr Gordon Grüt Radman
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Started diplomatic career at the Croatian Foreign Service in the early 90s, served in embassies in Switzerland and Bulgaria. Held numerous positions including Secretary General of the MFA, Ambassador to Hungary and Federal Republic of Germany, President of the Danube Commission.

H.E. Mr Ivan Korlak
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Mr Korlak is a career diplomat, and has served as Ambassador in Berlin and Washington, and as Permanent Representative to the EU. As “Ministre délégué” he represented the Slovak Republic during the Spanish Foreign Policy Presidency in the Council of the EU.

H.E. Dr Tomáš Peklíč
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Before joining the diplomatic service, Dr Peklíč worked as an advisor to a Member of the European Parliament, and gained experience of public administration when working at the Prague City Hall and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and International Security from Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Moderated by Ms Bethany Bell
Foreign Correspondent, BBC News. Bethany Bell has been a foreign correspondent for the BBC since 2001 and is currently based in Vienna. She is a regular contributor to Radio 4’s From Our Own Correspondent. Ms Bell is the senior producer and editor of UMDF’s podcast Awake at Night, which won a silver at the British Podcasting Awards 2019. She has reported from more than 30 countries throughout Europe, the Middle East and the United States.

H.E. Mr Pálter Szijjártó
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. He has been Member of Parliament for Fidesz since 2002, and in 2018, began his fifth term in Parliament. From 2006 to 2010, he was Fidesz Communications Director, between 2010 and 2014, he was Fidesz’s Spokesperson, and from 2012 to 2014, as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and External Economic Relations.

Mr Miroslav Lažák
European Union Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and Other Western Balkan Regional Issues. Mr Lažák is a career diplomat. Mr. Lažák’s professional instrumental in mediating post-conflict dialogue in the Western Balkans and helped shape the diplomatic service of the EU. He served as Ambassador in Belgrade and Tokyo. In May 2017, he was elected President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly and was Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in 2009-2010 and 2012-2020. Moderated by Mr Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bel Strategic Forum, Slovenia (See Opening)

Mr Miroslav Čaden
Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues. He joined the Bureau in September 2018 after serving as Acting Deputy Chief of Mission and Mission-Counselor for Political Affairs in Ottawa, Canada, from 2015 to 2016. Prior to Bayside A B (classis) from Haarfoot and an M.A. (Soviet and East European Affairs) from Columbia.

H.E. Mateusz Masiuk
Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland. Between 2015 and 2016 he held the office of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Development and Finance from 2016 to 2017. Due to his previous experience in banking and finance he was appointed to the Accession Negotiations Department in the Committee for European Integration and was a member of the group negotiating the accession of Poland to the EU. Mr Morawiecki is a holder of Master's Degree in Advanced European Studies from the University of Basel.

H.E. Mr Andrej Kiska
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovakia. Mr Kiska has been Prime Minister from 2004 to 2008 and from 2012 to 2013. He also served as the Minister for Defence between 1990 and 1994, as well as in 2000. He has been the president of the Slovak Democratic Party (IDS) since 1993 and is currently the vice-president of CD – ID. In 2008 he held the EU Council Presidency.

H.E. Mr Ivan Korčok
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia. He holds the office of Prime Minister since 2010, with a previous term in office between 1998 and 2002 when he was elected as one of the youngest Prime Ministers in Europe. Mr Orbán is President of Fidesz and Vice-President of the Centre for Democratic Internationa l. Mr Orbán graduated in law at the Eotvos Loránd University, Budapest, and studied Political Philosophy at Oxford.

H.E. Mr Miroslav Lajčák
Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia. After his first term (2011-2016), he was re-elected as Prime Minister for the second term after winning parlamentary elections in July 2020. He was elected as President of the Croatian Democratic Union (H.E.P) in July 2016 and re-elected in March 2020. He was Member of the European Parliament from 2013 to 2016 and Member of the Croatian Parliament from 2011 to 2013. Mr Plenković was State Secretary Parliamentary for European Affairs. He worked at the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a diplomat and was posted to Brussels and Paris. He holds a Master’s Degree in International Law from the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. He speaks English, French, Italian and German. 

Mr Máté Túri
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia. He has been active in politics since 2001 when he joined the NIS party at the municipal level. He was not a member of any Cabinet since 2011 when, for the first time, elected to the National Assembly. During almost ten years in the Parliament he was Leader of the National Assembly Group, Chairman of the Commission for the Supervision of Intelligence and Security Services, and Member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, where he was especially active in the Science and Technology Committee. He studied Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana.

Mr Matthew Bond
Deputy Assistant Secretary overseeing policy towards Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Mr Bond also oversees the Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues. He

Mr Matt Wroath
Deputy Assistant Secretary overseeing policy towards the United States, Europe and Asia, both in command and on the staff. Mr Wroath speaks Spanish, Italian and German. He

Mr Matthew Schierl
Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, United States Department of State. Mr Schierl oversaw the Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, he
Presentation of the BSF Distinguished Partner Award 2020

Mr Toma Kajzar, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr Kajzar is a university graduate in economics and international relations specialist. A career diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was first posted to the Slovenian Embassy in Egypt. In 2008, he served as Ambassador to the Republic of Finland and to the Republic of Estonia, and in 2003, as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. In 2012, he held the position of State Secretary at the Office of Prime Minister.

Ambassador Tuula Ylijärvi, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on behalf of the OSCE (Europe Against Cyber and Security Threats).
researching owing to his fruitful academic career at the Faculty of Social Studies, Ljubljana University. In 2000, he joined the Defence Studies Division as teaching assistant and researcher, later advancing to Head of Defence Studies and finally to Assistant Professor. At the end of 2018, he joined the Information Society and Informatics Directorate at the Ministry of Public Administration, where he successfully led the establishment of the Information Security Administration.

Closing Remarks
Mr Tone Kajzer, State Secretary, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia (See Presentation of the BSF Distinguished Partner Award 2020)

DIGITAL SESSIONS
The 5th Circular Change Conference: Stewarding Sustainability Transformations in Slovenia

Video address by Mr Tone Kajzer, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia (See Presentation of the BSF Distinguished Partner Award 2020)

Mr Andrej Vujak Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr Vujak has rich experiences from the private sector, where he worked on research and development projects on the computer automation of industrial processes. Later, he joined public administration and served as Labour Inspector, State Secretary for Employment at the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, and as Mayor of the Municipal- ty of Brežice. He was elected twice to the National Assembly and was appointed Minister of the Economy and Minister of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.

Ms ladaja Godina Kolir Chair of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform Conference (ECESP) and Founder of Circular Change. Ms Godina Kolir is an internationally recognized Circular Economy Leader, the Finalist of The Circular Awards / WIF 2018. As an entrepreneur with a background in the creative industries, she is currently the driving force of the circular economy in Slovenia and Central-Eastern Europe. She is also co-author of Roadmap towards the Circular Economy in Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Chile.

Plenary Session 1: An Insight into EU green & circular recovery/ followed by Q&A

Mr Freek van Eijk Managing Director of the Holland Circular Hotspot. As Managing Director of Accelerate. Mr van Eijk was the initiator of the first International Green Deal “The North Sea Resources Roundabout” and co-initiator of the Nederlands Circulari Programmes. He also supported UNIDO in setting up a CE strategy. Previously, he served as Director of strategy and PA at multinational corporation SUEZ and served as a board member of the Dutch Waste Management Association and the Society and Enterprise Foundation.

Mr Iain Gulland Chief Executive of Zero Waste Scotland. Mr Gulland has over 25 years of experience in sustainable resource management, including the initiation of recycling systems. He is President of the Association of Cities and Regions for Sustainable Resource Management and a member of Scottish Government strategic groups: the Environment and Economy Leaders Group, the board of the Low Carbon Infrastructure Transition Programme and the Expert Panel on Environmental Charges and Other Measures.

Mr Barna Kovacs PhD Secretary-General of the BIOEST Initiative. Mr Kovacs is currently working as a counsel- lor at the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU. Between 2009 and 2017, he worked as a scientific and policy officer in the European Commission. Mr Kovacs also served as Secretary for the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research. His responsibilities comprised research project management and policy definitions, contributing to conceptual reflections, strategic documents and new approaches in the implementation of the Bioeconomy Strategy.

Mr Gregor Sknder Manager at Deloitte Slovenia. With ten years of work experience in private and public sectors, Mr Sknder today works as a senior manager in the business consulting department of Deloitte d.o.o. in the field of human capital and sustainable development. In addition to a university degree in political science, Mr Sknder also obtained the title of Master of Business Studies – MBA at the Univer- sity of Ljubljana.

Plenary Session 2: Stewarding Sustainability Transformations in Slovenia / followed by Q&A

Ms Cliona Howie Head of Circular Economy Development and transition for EIT Climate-KIC. Having worked as an environmental consultant for over 20 years, Ms Howie del Rio developed large-scale, deep demonstrations on circular economy transition, working closely with national and regional governments as well as other stake- holders to ensure a systemic design and approach.

Ms Ianja Kraitymayer McKenzie Senior Policy Advisor at Ministry for the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia. As a circular economy expert and a policy counsellor, Ms Kraitymayer McKenzie worked on transition to a green and circular economy in Slovenia since 2014, among others, as a Deputy Head of Partner- ship for Green Economy. With extensive international experience, she participated as a national representative in various EU, UN and OECD bodies.

Ms Mojca Markizeti Sustainability Manager at Iskramec- co. Ms Markizeti has 20 years of experience in sustainable development strategies. Iskramecico is a company bringing “Intelligence to Energy” and is recognised as a trend- setter in this field. Being in the middle of the sweet spot of digital energy transition, the company was invited to lecture at the Global Goals Forum in Berlin in 2019.

Mr Barna Kovacs PhD Secretary-General of the BIOEST Initiative. Mr Kovacs is currently working as a counsel- lor at the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU. Between 2009 and 2017, he worked as a scientific and policy officer in the European Commission. Mr Kovacs also served as Secretary for the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research. His responsibilities comprised research project management and policy definitions, contributing to conceptual reflections, strategic documents and new approaches in the implementation of the Bioeconomy Strategy.
SAVE THE DATE

31 AUG — 1 SEPT 2021