Europe's great responsibility
The COVID-19 crisis has further weakened the multilateral system while favouring authoritarian regimes. Europe must act towards revival and a modernisation of the rules-based international order, fit for the 21st century.

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

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 This is the first major crisis in decades where the US is not in the lead and the actual US administration has mostly withdrawn from the global order it has built in the past.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 the pandemic 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 the post-COVID-19 world

If we stay true to our Western values, we stay true to our respective national cultures and identities

By Janez Janša, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

The COVID-19 crisis sparked a new wave of familiar debates in the international arena, such as the decline of the United States, the rise of China, the interconnectedness of threats in a globalized world, and the guns or butter dilemma. Yet, the coronavirus pandemic did not bring an end to the US-led world order; China is facing formidable domestic and international challenges in its continuous ascent; states have become aware of a broader strategic landscape; and globalization is being started anew.

As such, is there anything of paramount difference between the world pre- and post-pandemic? Yes, there is. The civilization fundamento to the aforementioned issues has come to the forefront. Not only are the other challenges epiphenomenal to the question of culture, but states can also no longer brush aside the question of values in favor of economic yields. Two theories that explain such a world come to mind. First, Carlo Pelanda’s Great Alliance Theory as ascent; states have become aware of a broader strategic landscape; and globalization is being started anew.

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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. Amidst 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 front pages 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 framework and an entirely new Recovery Instrument. That proved, to us and to the world, to our friends and to our 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 continue 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

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 VII 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 unwrapping 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 risk 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 hostilities 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-operative ly. 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 dramatic ways, 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 example, 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 57 participating States – have continued to operate, first virtually and now in “blended” form. The OSCE has continued to support negotiation formats addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine as well as protracted 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 even in the face of today’s difficult political environment. It has so far been an unusual anniversary year, as the OSCE marks 45 years since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act and 30 years since the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. But 2020 has also confirmed that the OSCE is ready to promote dialogue and offer expertise as well as practical tools developed over recent decades to help states work together constructively to address wide-ranging security challenges.

The OSCE will continue on this path under the political leadership of its Albanian Chair throughout the remainder of 2020, and its incoming Swedish Chair in 2021 – just as we have been doing under a different Chair every year, including under the Slovenian one in 2005.
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

NATO’S response to COVID-19

Key political workstrands and early lessons

/ By Ambassador Bettina Cadenbach, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
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 that 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 engaged; 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 Co-operation 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.

Globalism is also the only chance we have to overcome the very serious environmental 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 modernisation of the rules-based international order, fit for the 21st century.
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 dims their analysis. There may be an ideational competition for global governance with a significant civilizational underpin, but the crucial disagreements take place within those contending 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 civilization 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. So far, we have done so through liber- alism and enlightenment. This gave rise to the Rousseau-nisation of these liberal values, which does not leave room for cultural particularities and which has been named ‘Cultural Marxism’.

Such a globalist narrative argues that humans are inherently good. Therefore, the global governance struggle is between good and bad people, not nations, or civilizations. Moreover, good and bad individuals are found across the world, so there is nothing exclusive about the Western culture. Subsequently, they want to dismantle the past and its institu- tions, such as the nation–state and religion since why would we keep them if they allow for and enable mischievous people to govern? We have seen this during the COVID-19 pandemic, where in the name of universal good and justice people are tearing down statues, re-writ- ing history, destroying precious and necessary institutions in an attempt to disassemble national culture and identity. All this in the name of an ideal or ideology. Systemically, this is no different from other totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century: it does not allow for individual freedom and individual identity. Ultimately, the world would be run as a multi- national company. As such, in order to change such interpretation and the end result of Western values, we need to change their lineage.

One such option, which has also been present during the COVID-19 pandemic, is to abandon these values altogether, as they do not serve their purpose of enhancing the prosperity of nation states. Needless to say, I believe this to be the wrong approach. Such nationalismists are in favor of protectionism, increased securitization, de-globalization, and selective human rights. This answer is diametrically opposed to the idea of a Europe whole and Europe free. Yet, crawling back to our national fortresses will not give Europe and the West the power we need for the struggle for global governance. Sub- sequently, Western civilization cannot prevail in the contest for global governance, as there is no Western civilization anymore.

The second option is a process by which we re-establish Western values on a different basis – Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Judeo-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. Daes Ryn wrote: ‘We do not have to choose between universality and particularity, as postmodernists insist because of their obsession with contingency and insistence on untrammeled 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 exposures, critical infra- structure. European and national will not be juxtaposed against each other, but inherently joined together. Paraphrasing Prof. Ryen 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 unnecessary, 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 (as well as intra-North American and -European) 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 preoccupation 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, has raised trust in the country in both Europe and America. American reaction has included publication of a new China strategy in May offering a “fundamental re-evaluation” of approach as well as a coordinated series of critical policy speeches by four senior officials in June and July. In broader perspective, Asia has shaped transatlantic interaction brought by Brexit adds to address them do not by themselves assure unity, but they present a useful tool for raising the odds. 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.
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 differences over how much money will hopefully help heal months of public anger and frustration over the bloc’s initially disappointingly slow progress on 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 acrimonious world. Re-establishing public trust in EU institutions will be conditional on just how quickly the European Commission 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 currently in an upswing as expected, EU recovery measures kick in to ease the pandemic’s devastating economic impact. The bad news is that details of the Conference remain sketchy and instead of working together, EU institutions appear to be at each other’s throats again.

Responding to demands for a stronger EU global role will be even more challenging, but increasingly urgent, as the EU has the multi-lateral credentials as well as the regulatory and market power to matter worldwide. It now needs to be build up credentials as an independent political actor.

This demands that European leaders step out of America’s shadow and stay committed to multilateralism. Importantly, when campaigning across the world, EU representatives will also have to demonstrate that they are practicing what they preach at home.

Weaning themselves off an over-dependence on the US is proving difficult for both the EU per se and for member state governments, a fact recognised by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The quandary isn’t Europe’s alone. As Merkelunderlined, a world that grew up in the “certain knowledge” of the US as a global power now has to adjust to a new reality. And this is unlikely to change even if US President Donald Trump is not re-elected.

EU discussions on “strategic autonomy,” strategic autonomy is now also being sought on economic questions such as trade, the screening of foreign investments and a post-pandemic focus on re-shoring supply chains linked to essential health products.

The world needs cool-headed global leadership. Can the EU deliver?

Will the EU transform from an important global player to an indispensable one.

By Shada Islam, EU commentator and analyst, Founder of New Horizons Project, a global advisory and strategy company
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. 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 crisis, paradoxically, revalued 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 solidarity. 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 potency 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 leaning 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-
Germany and France within the E3 with big EU member countries, i.e. cooperation. It prefers coordination in security, defence and foreign policy to any agreement with the EU in the near future. The situation could become extremely challenging. Along with the corona recession, the EU's customs union and single market, if the UK were no longer part of the EU, companies must be prepared for "EU's red lines." Otherwise, citizens of course taking into account the every effort to reach the agreement, the EU. The opening of new negotiations after the end of the transition period is not excluded either. If a second wave of coronavirus outbreak were to hit the European continent at the end of the transition period and the agreement on the EU-UK future relationship was not concluded by then, the economic and political consequences would be severe for both the UK and the EU. It is therefore imperative to put in every effort to reach the agreement, of course taking into account the EU's red lines. Otherwise, citizens and companies must be prepared for the systemic shock that would occur if the UK were no longer part of the EU’s customs union and single market. Along with the corona recession, the situation could become extremely challenging.  

A new geopolitical balance: global cold war? The pandemic and the development of digital technology have further intensified the global competition among major actors, particularly between the two most powerful – the US and China, and have reshaped the global distribution of power. The EU remains almost the only great power advocating multilateralism and international law and is highly dependent on the US and NATO in terms of security and defence. And this will not change on short-term. Transatlantic relations are transforming, as the US is shifting its focus to the Pacific and East Asia. China is the primary challenger to American global dominance. The allies from the EU in NATO, which remains the key pillar of European defence, will have to take on more burdens and responsibilities in resolving the situation in their Eastern and Mediterranean neighbourhoods, perhaps even in the Middle East. The outcome of the upcoming US presidential elections will make a difference to that. In the medium term, it is difficult to put into practice the ideas about ‘strategic autonomy’ or a ‘geopolitical EU, even about a ‘European army,’ because of the differing views within the EU and the reduction of budgetary funds for the European Defence Fund. The EU will need to digitally and innovatively transform its economy to be able to play a more equal role in the global arena.  

The man global economic and cyber conflict is, therefore, a bipolar conflict between the US and China. It is almost a civilizational clash of two systems underpinned by differing values and ideologies. China is fiercely and aggressively penetrating into Europe too, particularly into the Western Balkans. During the corona crisis, China lost some of the world’s trust due to the epidemic information, as well as events in the South China Sea, near the Galápagos Islands, along the Indian-Chinese border and in Hong Kong. In the contrast to the West, China’s ideological and political system is far from being plural, democratic and based on the concept of open society. China is a closed country run by a single party, and a leading force in digital mass surveillance and mass collection of personal data. Digital Huawei, which is supposed to be owned by employees, is probably a private and independent company only on paper. In the digital era, this is dangerous. The West, until now divided, will need to seek a more unified stance towards China’s global rise and particularly its penetration into Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean. Europe is more vulnerable than the US. The US is actively pushing to completely divide global supply chains, so it is highly unlikely that it will be willing to give up on the implementation of security standards of 5G technology. It would even find the possible EU’s economic neutrality towards China disruptive. A complete shift in American politics towards China and Russia is not to be expected, not even after the US presidential elections. Europe on the other hand is looking at how to include China in establishing new global rules for new technologies. EU should narrow the gap with the American technology giants and protect itself from Chinese intrusions. It should be firm on investment reci-procity with China, and protect critical infrastructure and technologies. This is why some informal debates are already taking place within Europe as to whether to withdraw from the 17+1 Chinese European initiative. Most of all, the EU should actively pursue its enlargement policy in the Western Balkans, not surrendering the region to its strategic rivals. Although the EU has labelled China as a “systemic rival”, it has no wish of participating in this new block cold war. However, as a part of the Western world (which we equate with liberal democracy, human rights and liberties), the EU will have to build its own digital sovereignty and rapidly unify its Member States for a common policy on global threats and particularly China’s activities as China likes to take advantage of internal EU divisions (e.g. the EU Declaration on developments in the South China Sea). Having launched an analysis within the “Strategic Compass” initiative, the EU should no longer be so naive. China definitely poses a strategic challenge. Part of this policy includes the reinvigoration of allied transatlantic relations and joint implementation of the fundamental pillars of Western civilization also in the digital world. We need to act as mature and competent allies and partners. Paradoxically, we need to revitalise and strengthen our transatlantic ties in order to find suitable ways for business cooperation with global China. It will be also necessary to cooperate with China. The Conference on the Future of Europe, which should be launched in the autumn, will need to address the post-COVID vision for the EU based also on the three challenges outlined. All these issues will also be discussed at the 15th Bled Strategic Forum under this year’s title: “Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-COVID – 19 World, Neighbours – Regions – Global World. Partners or Rivals?"
Strategists must explore how decision-making through algorithms most people cannot understand will affect the dynamics of strategic competition, crisis management, as well as war.

We have been here before in the face of significant technological disruption. In 1945, the world absorbed the fact that one plane with one bomb could destroy an entire city. Strategists quickly realized that national security could no longer be maintained through defense, since one defense was one hundred percent perfect. Security had for millennia rested on one’s own hands—defending a castle. But the devastation that nuclear weapons promised meant that one’s security now rested in the decision-making of others. Therefore—often more than needed to initiate war in the first place. The technology required a vast number of smaller, lighter, easier-to-produce weapons. 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 consider that once again technological advancement is of such a nature that it, in fact, disrupts the very definition of strategy and action thus the operationalization of security. While nuclear 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 rather than fought and won.

But what if cyber represents a path to compete for strategic ends—rather than relative power nationally, regionally, and globally—without going in war? What if the basic features of this technology enable us to simply avoid deterrence thresholds, while achieving outcomes that to date required the crossing of said thresholds? Would we not need to re-conceptualize and re-operationize our approach to security once again?

What are these features of cyber-space that might prove to be so disruptive? First, every policy document on cyber space begins with the notion that it is ‘global and interconnected’. And yet, what follows tends to treat it as a throwaway line, rather than the organizing principle. A coherent strategy of interconnectedness must understand that cyber space is not simply a military domain; it is a domain in which the military must operate simultaneously with the business sector, allies, adversaries, and individuals (including fit and over-weight hackers). Second, interconnectedness means that national security actors are in ‘constant contact’ with the adversary and other important players. This is distinct from ‘proximity’ or potential contact that exists in others domains. Constant 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-

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The relationship between technology and its social impact is particularly complex in the view of conflict analysis. On the one hand, technology may result in the obsolescence of determinants of war in which it was developed, and on the other, it may change the systems within which the environment beyond recognition. Communication capabilities of digital information technology form the basis for several temporary societies into information societies. Security in the global age has basically changed in conceptual (theoretical) as well in practical sense for the individual, nation-states and supranational organizations. No longer is it necessary to oppose the thesis that politico of the future is essentially cyber policy (cyberpolitik), because community actors have not only been states. Today, the modern international environment is significantly more complex and unstable than it was when kinetic warfare in the physical environment was the most common instrument for achieving political goals. In the era of digitization and information revolution, information and communication technologies. This refers to increased exposure to attack, configure the environment and increase the power of small countries as one of the 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 information technology is increasingly changing, yet the state remains a key factor in the modern international security in the world of modern conflicts, the state is indeed only one of the parts, but also the single most important one. Therefore, understanding the development of the information revolution is essential for both political decision-makers and analysts.

The digital information revolution was initiated in a liberal capitalist society by a predominant influence of individuals as well as non-governmental and private sector. Particularly in the first phase, it seemed that the state would be most disadvantaged by the information revolution. Technology giants established themselves as important political actors within countries and internationally, taking on the characteristics of traditional states in many respects. In the field of security studies, the new concept was emerging, which saw the symbiosis between the idea of information technology, best reflect the growing importance of conceptualizing asymmetric and hybrid threats that have spilled over into a theme to characterize the features of contemporary conflicts. The usage of asymmetric-hybrid approaches to achieve geopolitical goals did not begin with the development and expansion of information technology. But the symbiosis between the idea of asymmetric, 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 not only their goals. All social spheres (public and private) as well as both civilian and military targets can benefit from this type of threat. This feature is one of the most important ones, which mainly affects the establishment in a crisis management system and the perception of threats. The unlimited intentions also have the effect of redefining the relationships between the elements of the national security system, both between the defence and security elements and within them in both (civil and military defence, intelligence services - police, gendarmerie).

Inequality in the information development and use of ICT by modern societies and countries is undoubtedly witnessing a renovation 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 renovation of the role of the state in ensuring security. Logically weaker parties to exploit the opponents' 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

In July, the British Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee published its Russia Report, describing how the government and its institutions neglected and underestimated the Kremlin’s information meddling into the Brexit referendum in 2016. The authors analyse the cyber attacks, disinformation operations, or the influence of Russian oligarchs and dirty money, and they conclude that: “The Government had badly underestimated the Russian threat and the response it required.”

In August, the US Senate’s intelligence committee published a nearly 1,000-page report dedicated to the Russian meddling in the 2016 Presidential elections. It is already the fifth report produced by this body on this topic. It says that the Kremlin “engaged in an aggressive, multifaceted effort to influence, or attempt to influence” the 2016 election.

Apart from the Senate reports, there is also the widely published Mueller report that had already resulted in indictions, convictions and guilty pleas. Plus, there were at least 17 other distinct court cases related to the Russian interference in the 2016 elections by the end of 2018 (as counted by Wired).

Even the authors of the British report admit that the US have dealt with the meddling better than the UK. “We have not been provided with any post-redux referendum assessment of Russian attempts at interference […] This situation is in stark contrast to the "US handling of allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election," says the July report.

What about Europe’s efforts?

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, including elections in the biggest countries like Germany, France or Italy, or the European elections last year — there is not a single comparable investigation in any of the countries of the EU, and there is not a single similar investigation on the EU level.

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 the various investigations in the US produced some new knowledge, which leads 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’s only investigations from the media and civil society that has no legal implications, and that is easily dismissed by the side actors. For instance, state-sanctioned trolling from the current representatives of Russia.

Another implication of the lack of investigations is to undermine the effect of information operations. As described in Ian 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 behaviour 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 unbearable consequences for the information aggressor. Which means that the Kremlin can freely continue with its disinformation aggression. Moreover, over, it means that other aggressors see that Europe allows this kind of aggression, and does not punsh it. Which, unsurprisingly, means that they learn from the Kremlin and use the same weapons.

As we see 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 serving their political purposes. That makes it easier for the skilled, state-sanctioned trolling from the current representatives of Russia.

Another implication of the lack of investigations is that the response of the EU is completely detached from the crises it is facing. To deal with it properly, one has to understand the nature of the threat. And that’s very hard, as the EU has no idea how many channels of disinformation it’s dealing with. 1. The disinformation is happening also in social media, which are not understandable for the EU authorities. 2. There’s no investigation from the authorities, only investigations from the media and civil society that has no legal implications, and that is easily dismissed by the side actors. 3. There’s no investigation from the authorities, only investigations from the media and civil society that has no legal implications, and that is easily dismissed by the side actors.

And finally, it is imperative to punish the information aggressors. The first step for that is the investigation — without an investigation, it’s not clear who deserves to be punished, and for what. There are many ways how the malicious actors can be punished, from simply denying access to their channels (e.g. not treating Russia Today and other Kremlin’s outlets as media organisations, when it is in fact just an information weapon of the Russian army) all the way to sanctions not only against individuals like Dmitry Kiselyov and Vladimir Solovyov, who then wouldn’t be able to enjoy the salary paid for lying about the West in the West, but also against the disinformation-oriented organisations, which would cut them off the millions of dollars they receive in advertising revenues from Western companies. Kremlin’s channels that are used as a weapon against the West are currently receiving massive funding from Western companies. It is just like that Lenin’s capitalist is selling to Soviets the rope with which he will hang them.

Within each of the four lines of defence, there are many individual measures that can be adopted, each of them increasing our chance to succeed in the defence against hostile information aggression. All we need is the political will to finally act.
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

Caught in the middle

It is values, values, values. This is the part we shall not compromise on, because we firmly believe it embodies the progress of humankind.

China in the long-run building leverage in CEE with the aim of having an influence on Russia.

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 disadvan-
tage 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 geo-
ographically removed and always will be ‘oceans apart’. Russia, however, is and always will be a power to con-
tend 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-strategic 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 Flessenkermp, Head of Office, Council of Europe, Belgrade, Serbia

On Saturday, 11 July 2020 statements of European and world leaders echoed in a car-battery factory in Potocari. The speakers were unable to travel in person to BiH and therefore for the occasion, they were invited and more 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 commemoration 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 on 8,372 Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian, mainly men and boys were killed.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Strasbourg-based political organisation of 47 European states, which is considered 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 killed 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 in a particularly unforgivable 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 the region. Some of the major crimes have been investigated and adjudicated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The Hague and in many cases 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 “reparation 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 failed individually and collectively. A reminder how societies dehumanised their members, citizens, neighbours, others - dispossessing, degrading, expelling and ultimately killing people. No one could claim that they did not know what was happening, satellite-TV broadcasted from the frontlines of the conflict.

The Council of Europe summit in Vienna 1993 warned “Europe is a source of immense hope which must in no event be destroyed by territorial ambitions, the resurgence of aggressive nationalism, the perpetuation of spheres of influence, intolerance or totalitarian ideologies. We condemn all such aberrations. They are plunging peoples of former Yugoslavia into hatred and Europe and threaten other regions”.

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was ended with the General Framework Agreement for Peace signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. It was not to be the last armed conflict in this region in the 21st century. However, 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 Yugoslavia”.

In her immediate neighbourhood. As an act of political will, the promise marking the genocide in Srebrenica and Herzegovina for the occasion, as called for at the Vienna summit? 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 Balkans? How to manage transformation 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 and Herzegovina 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 Community to its parliamentary and intergovernmental bodies and institutions, its European norms embodied in the European Convention on Human Rights, and prevention of crimes against humanity remains a central task “from the level of the individual through to international organisations, we can take the opportunity to educate and be educated”, as Marija Pejčinović Burić reminded in Srebrenica. European unity espouses hope for states and people in the region, an opportunity to break with the negative continuities that seem to be reemerging across the continent.

No good comes out of undermining multilateral cooperation in Europe, no freedom is gained in leaving human rights treaties, no rule of law is built without international judicial institutions, no democracy has flourished without freedom of assembly, expression and movement, no culture and education will develop where corruption prevails. There will be no security and stability where hatred on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, or any other difference, reigns.

Changed Western Balkans

The Council of Europe and the European Union have made a pledge to the people of Western Balkans that European unity will safeguard their human rights and fundament freedoms into the future. For 70 years now, the European Convention on Human Rights underpins this commitment and binds the two organisations together. This is symbolised by Germany’s twin presidencies of the Council of Europe and the European Union from summer 2020 until spring 2021. In July next year, Slovenia will conclude the Presidency Trio it formed with Germany and Portugal, all three of them committed to the political unity of Europe.

The forthcoming EU Presidency is the fruit of Slovenia’s independence declared on 25 June 1991. Thirty years on Slovenia has the privilege to once again advance European unity, to consolidate the promise 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.

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Despite COVID-19 pandemic, regional cooperation in Western Balkans must continue unabated.

/ By Dr Djergj Murra, Executive Director, Western Balkans Fund

Still struggling to come to terms with its past, the Western Balkans remains one of the world’s most challenging environments in which to build reconciliation and harmonious relations between communities. For any organisation seeking to foster, promote and encourage exchange and learning across the Western Balkans, this would be a challenging enough proposition.

But one organisation, the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) as an instrument for enhancing the, so called, “soft connectivity,” and boosting human mobility and people to people links, the WBF Governments have shown both vigorous political goodwill and robust leadership.

Putting needs before differences

The Fund was officially launched on September 5th 2017 in Bled, Slovenia, during a WB6 Foreign Minister Conference. Its establishment, as an all-inclusive and regionally owned organisation, followed a long and elaborate process. This included the ratification of the WBF Agreement by Parliaments of its six Contracting Parties: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Its Secretariat is located in Tirana, employing international staff from all its founding members.

The bulk of the Fund’s financial resources are provided by the governments of the WB6, in equal quotas. This relationship of trust and mutual commitment makes WBF quite unique, making it a clear image of reconciliation and trust-building in action.

Identifying “people to people links,” the benefits of regional coherency in preserving and enriching the regional identity, WBF is a clear and real step forward in dealing with the past by focusing on the palpable benefits of an interdependent future for the people of the Western Balkans.

The path is long and fraught with obstacles. But, in the view of the first concrete results achieved, the work has begun and the learning and evidence about regional cooperation is being harvested. There is a growing understanding about the benefits of regional cooperation as a means of peaceful coexistence, reconciliation and economic/social development. And it’s a real pleaser, for more people than ever before are now talking to each other across our region.

Half of the Fund’s grant applications originated outside WB6 capitals and from newly established organisations. 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 4-3 projects already closed, more than 10,000 people have come together in a variety of exit 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 neighborhood relations.

COVID-19 – a gift to the oppor- tunities 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. In conditions when 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 organisations 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 an opportunity to reinforce the notion of ‘social distance’ into a permanent practice – the very antithesis of regional cooperation. The pandemic is a wake-up call for us to reinvigorate regional cooperation. Unless we take now 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 in the short-term.

One of our concerns is that the fear of infection will be stoked to create a long-term opposition to regional exchange, and thus undermine the nascent culture of regional mobility that the WBF seeks to enable. As organisations 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 our partnership with all those who do not enjoy rapid internet access, and particularly important in terms of accountability.

- The Secretariat continues to be actively operational, using a hybrid of remote and write work methods.
- The Fund’s grant programme is now even more targeted than before. We are adapting our support to the individual needs of our stakeholders, encouraged by the WBF’s Council of Senior Officials recently signed off on the Fund’s new five-Year Strategy. The Senior Officials determined that the Strategy document must reflect an adaptability and a flexibility in order to respond reliably and effectively in a volatile political, economic and social (and now, public health) environment.
- A valuable Strategy plan can not hold the organisation hostage to fixed approaches that no longer make sense when the whole world has changed, six months after the plan was written.
- The pandemic hit, the Fund immediately mobilised a series of adaptations to its partnership and support approach aiming delivering results.

The pandemic is a wake-up call for us all to reinvent regional cooperation.

If we are learning, like many organisations, we are reviewing our approach according to the need our approach needs to be swiftly flexible, even in the toughest of times.

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 4-3 projects already closed, more than 10,000 people have come together in a variety of exit initiatives, aiming to know better each other, supporting reconciliation and exchange of best practices.

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Go to the Western Balkan Fund’s website and you will see this on its home page: ‘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 cooperated more effectively, if they enjoyed much stronger relationships, if they benefitted from regional cohesion at all levels and yes, if they became members of the EU? What is the sum total of these soaring ambitions? So, for the Western Balkans Fund – can conspicuously 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, not a sophisticated international funding agency putting unwelcome pressure on the Fund’s stakeholders share its benefits. The Western Balkan Fund has a real step forward towards reconciliation? Beyond the bulk of the funding that supports its accounts are ‘reconciled’. In English this has led to the term ‘reconciliation’ becoming inextricably linked to the notion of coming to terms with a generally accepted truth about what happened when relations were not friendly at all. This is where the rubber meets the road in dealing with 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 to them. In Slavic languages, the notion of reconciliation is perhaps less fraught with complexity. The term refers to the broad notion of peace, negotiation, patching things up.

In Albanian, reconciliation speaks a little more to the notion of being attuned, bringing together, engagement and cooperation.

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Your taxes at work

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

/ By Jeremy Condar, Independent Management Consultant

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resolutions, and not from an international partner. On reflection, and in this complex context, this is perhaps a miracle after all. It flies in the face of accepted thought that the Contracting Parties remain at daggers drawn. Here is regional cooperation for a reason – and with a truly powerful ambition – the profound restoration of friendly relations at a sustained level. Maybe we won’t ever share the same narrative about our pasts, but we will live peaceably together. We will find more that we share than that which divides us. We will count on each other. We will build a shared future. We refuse to be tyrannised by the past.

The process is the product

To the cynic, perhaps all this sounds like development poetry – vague, aspirational and, in all likelihood – content-free. But here, in this context, the process is also the product. Indeed it is arguably more the product than 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 unison 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 founders’ 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 ostensible project ‘result’. A region, working for its own common interest, and celebrating its differences as well as its innumerable commonalities.

The only triumph here is a cross-boundary triumph of people who came together from across the region and beat the odds, proved that they work in harmony, struggle in unison 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 founders’ 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 ostensible project ‘result’. A region, working for its own common interest, and celebrating its differences as well as its innumerable commonalities.

The advocates of Dealing with the Past – of whom I count myself as one – would tell us that true reconciliation is a transformative experience, and it can only acquire real meaning when all who have suffered in conflict enjoy the right to the truth, the right to justice, the right to reparations, and what Louis (Sisette) called ‘Guaran-tees of Non-Recurrence’.

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The automotive industry is entering a once-in-a-century transformation and Toyota is ready for it. Toyota’s directions are clear: provide mobility for all.

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 aims, beliefs 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 mobility services offer in addition to traditional private and fleet vehicle sales through a strategy based on increasing its share of the full-service leasing market, which consists of providing multi-brand all-in-one 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 Slovenia 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 Vozm 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.

Mobility for all!

/ By Kensuke Tsuchiya, President, Toyota Adria

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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 Hatzigeorgou, 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 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 2023.

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, 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 2023.

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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.

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), 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

‘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 increasing 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 recycling, reusing, repairing, remaking and finally recycling to keep limited natural resources in a ‘loop’ for 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 CeluComp 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, CircEconomy.

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 rigs and wind turbines, and the bioeconomy.

Shortages of PPE during lockdown highlighted both the inventiveness and resilience of businesses in Scotland 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 protect staff and customers. It was great to see our distillers and brewers moving fast from making whisky and beer to hand sanitiser to protect staff and customers.

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. Like Slovenia, Scotland is also famous for its spectacular scenery. Ben Nevis is the highest Scottish peak, 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 protect staff and customers.

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 change 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 produce, use and often throw out after just one use. This evidence shows that around 80% of Scotland’s carbon footprint comes from all the goods, services and materials which we produce, use and often throw out after just one use. This evidence led to key policy changes, including the introduction of the Scottish Government’s climate change targets of reducing food waste by a third by 2025.

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 lifted 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.
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 past 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. 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 policing 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 very 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 -95% and towards -95% compared to 1990 levels. The question I would like to be considered is: can we raise the bar even higher?

During our little road trip through the plains of Germany and Poland we saw countless wind parks with their huge blades spinning to produce wind energy. Of course, for the last 10 years, the main solution countries...
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.

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 a solid fact for a long time now that energy efficiency can significantly improve as a result of building an intelligent grid and an intelligent energy management system, integrating smart homes and digitalizing the industry. Based on EU legislation, over the last 20 years EU countries have increasingly installed smart meters (the target was set at 80% of smart metering points by 2020), while energy efficiency and a reduction in the CO2 footprint were also part of the goals. Firstly, countries are failing to live up to the expected quantities and secondly, in majority the data provided is far from being used for any of the intelligent energy management functions, which would result in improved energy efficiency. The potential, however, exists — efficiency in the grid can be improved by 3% to up to 10%, depending on the base line of the country. Let me illustrate this using Iskraemco as a business case. One of the ten largest electric grid companies in Russia implemented Iskraemco’s solution package, which consists of smart energy meters, data management and software services. This enabled the company to receive real-time information about network conditions, where more than 3.5 million online parameters are analyzed. In-depth data are beneficial not only for the company itself, but also for various other market participants, giving them useful insights into strategic operations and planning and delving results such as pushing down high energy losses by 11% in just two years. Part of the project — improved energy efficiency of transmission and distribution networks — has led to a significant reduction in direct and indirect CO2 emissions.

To continue the display of untapped opportunities of energy decarbonization, let’s break down emissions by source into three major groups: buildings, industry and transport.

Buildings today account for 40% of the total energy consumption, including electricity consumption. Buildings are also responsible for 34% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in the EU. However, buildings can be decarbonized and their energy performance can be improved through a number of solutions. One way to achieve this is by sharing energy consumption data with end users and providing them with modern applications that enable consumers and prosumers to optimize their household 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, provided they know and use their energy consumption data. Some countries would argue that end users are not interested in managing their energy consumption. This, however, contradicts the outcome of the recent Eurobarometer survey, according to which a total of 93% of EU citizens see climate change as a serious problem and a significant majority of the EU population wants to see increased action on climate change.

Industry is responsible for 25% of final energy consumption and about 20% of the total greenhouse gas emissions. In this regard, significant emission reductions in the industrial sector are needed to contribute to climate neutrality by 2050 and to meet the zero pollution ambition. This will require technologies to be tested and deployed at scale within the 2030 timeframe, taking into account the investment cycles in industry. According to Bahaa Abdulrah, Iskraemco’s CFO, much can be done to set an example for industry to follow. “Over the last five years Iskraemco has achieved a 70% reduction in its CO2 footprint per product, largely due to smart circular design and energy-efficient, lean production. The company is currently completing its second wave of investments, focused on implementing automated, digitalized production and further advancing the product designs by embedding recycled materials and relying on local suppliers, which are foreseen to bring CO2 emissions down by a further 50% compared to last year’s baseline.”

We have one message, however, EU industry will invest intensively in the green transition, therefore EU infrastructure and governments should take advantage of EU industry as their suppliers. There is quite often a situation whereby in public procurement, prices of ‘third country’ companies win over EU companies, I will quote Iskraemco’s CEO, Luis Goncalves, “competition is a good thing, it is what is pushing the technological development further, but it needs to be fair.” This has also been noticed by the EU and a White Paper is published on the topic of foreign subsidies, with a public consultation open until the end of September. We commend that and would like to lead the debate to one very connected issue – CO2 leakage. The EU says that it only emits 8% of world emissions, while so many industries have been outsourced and so many goods consumed are produced elsewhere. Every product and service has its lifecycle environmental and social footprint and this has to be calculated into EU emissions and put forward as a transparent benchmark within public procurement. Let’s make EU industry green and let’s take our technologies across the world. Two of the most important COVID-19 lessons are to be strategically independent and to cut supply chains shorter.

Road transportation as the last of the big CO2 sources is responsible for 20% of CO2 emissions. We all see e-mobility as the big solution, however, it does not help if vehicle batteries are charged by fossil fuel energy, and neither if multiplying e-vehicles in the grid are disproportionately enlarging the consumption and destabilizing energy management. In this situation, accurate data with analytics and further developed solutions can also enable us to achieve positive results on energy efficiency, looking from many different angles, i.e. end user, community or grid. Iskraemco is one of the companies developing solutions of intelligent integration of e-mobility into household, community and energy systems at large.

To summarize, as described above, there are huge potentials in energy efficiency improvements when existing technologies are used to their full potential. Data (secure, of course) is the most valuable tool we have to create a better and safer world. Therefore, we urge stakeholders of the energy industry to achieve synergies and cooperation, and policy makers to have better understanding and quicker reactions. Nowadays, we are often in between Dataphobia – being afraid of data – and Datatopia – the vision of a better world achieved through the use of smart technologies. The world needs smart and prompt decisions.
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 issue and started to develop policies at the national level, through intense political discussions on the proposed strategies, directives, policies and action plans. Today the European Commission furthered this process by proposing the European (CEE) member states’ bioeconomy strategy and initiated political decisions on the way forward, setting, going hand in hand with political parameters preparing the policies and actions. The proposed deal will also influence the new policy setting, going hand in hand with political decisions on the way forward, and is, moreover, expected to be supported by the societies.

It has been only a few years since the EU’s Central and Eastern European (CEE) member states’ policy formulation started to respond directly to the EU directive on circular economy, to a lesser extent to the EU Green Deal. Currently some of the member states are in a difficult position; the trade-offs required to implement such an overarching strategy and to reach some emerging compromises that will in turn affect the political landscape. The proposed action plan will also influence the new policy setting, going hand in hand with political decisions on the way forward, and is, moreover, expected to be supported by the societies.

The sustainable road ahead

The sustainable bioeconomy is not complete without the circular economy 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.
The sustainable transformation of our societies is unimaginable without a heavy investment into research and innovation.

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. In this context, it 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 struggle 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. The median salary for more than half of the BIOEAST countries’ population is just a little bit above 1,000 euro per year. Without far-reaching conclusions, it should at least be stated that an influential part of the electorate 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 politics, responsible for defining the future evolution of the private sector, thus also 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.

Ladeja Godina Košir and Cliona Howie del Río are both experts on circular economy and sustainable development. As a kind of orchestrators, they are supporting countries and regions on their journeys towards circular economy systemic transition. Mrs. Godina Košir has recently been engaged in the circular economy road-mapping process in countries such as Chile, Montenegro and Serbia. 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.

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.

However, quite a few Slovenian companies have stepped on the path of circular transition in order to maintain their international competitiveness - despite the fact, that they have to invest their own resources into circular transition. Another anchor for circular change are Slovenian cities - such as Ljubljana, Maribor and Kranj. They have already integrated circular principles into their city strategies. During the lock-down, due to the COVID-19, we realized, how many circular frontrunners we have among citizens and micro companies. Platforms for distribution of local food have flourished, for example, as well as urban gardening. Priorities have changed as well as daily habits – more cycling, more exchange of goods, less consumption, to name a few. I believe that Climate-KIC’s demonstration project is bringing a much needed “external push” that will connect key “circular dots” in Slovenia and foster concrete circular transition as part of the EU Green Recovery process.

As the chair of the Coordination Group of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform in Brussels, I have been following the transitional processes in other European countries. Some of them have progressed significantly in the last 2 years (for example Slovakia, Czech Republic, France), with a clear focus, a systemic approach, strong stakeholders’ engagement and efficient allocation of financial resources.

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 2020, 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.
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 ‘Partnership 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 end of the I&V governance phase, 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 systemic transition. It will provide an example of rapid change to a circular economy.

Cliona: Creativity and innovation are the driving forces of change. While implementing the “circular triangle” as the core of the Slovene Road-mapping principle back in 2018, we have highlighted circular economy and circular change. When talking about circular strategy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change). When talking about circular strategy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change). When talking about circular strategy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change).

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 overhearing 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 service and 12 Circular Economy Regional action plans developed.

Q: How did you choose the main areas Slovenia should be working on in order 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.

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

Q: Two of the core driving forces for the circular transition are creativity and 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 implementing the “circular triangle” as the core of the Slovenian Road-mapping principle back in 2018, we have highlighted circular economy and circular change. When talking about circular economy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change). When talking about circular strategy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change). When talking about circular strategy, we talk about the “circular triangle” (next to circular economy and circular change)

Q: Mrs. Howie del Rio, can you share with us how has the situation influenced the realization of Deep Demonstration in Slovenia?

Cliona: First and foremost, I must say intense work was under way throughout the past months while we were all staying at home. The proposal is now finalised and is waiting for governmental approval, which will be the next necessary step to the actual launch of the Deep Demonstration. It is true that a lot of the funding that could potentially be unlocked for the activities planned in the first phase of the Deep Demonstration (2020-2021) has been redirected to the COVID-19 recovery packages passed by the government. However, as already mentioned before, many new opportunities opened as the EU’s Recovery Plan puts a strong emphasis on supporting post-COVID recovery pathways that are resilient and sustainable at the same time – just like the Deep Demonstration in Slovenia. At EIT Climate-KIC we are working with the government of Slovenia to unlock the potential of the Deep Demonstration. The Deep Demonstration is progressing underway for the Recovery and Resilience Fund, the just Transition Fund and other Next Generation EU instruments, as well as preparing for the Operational programme for the 2021-2027 period, with measures to support a green and carbon neutral transition at its core.

Q: Why did you choose the 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.

Q: What are the main drivers for change in the Slovenian 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.
ON-SITE SESSIONS

7.30– Registration and Information
@Rikli Balance Hotel

8.00–9.30
Combo AmCham Business Breakfast: Collaboration Between Businesses, State, Civil Society and Academia as the Right Response to the New Normal
@Rikli Balance Hotel, Amold Hall
In partnership with AmCham Slovenia.

Mr Igor Cesarec, Research Economist, Citi Group
Ambassador Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Mr Juraj Leskovec, Associate Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University
Mr Jonathan Moore, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, United States Department of State

Views from the business and investment sector

Mr Jan Bervar, Architect, Conscia Group
Mr Joe Philipsz, Architect, Conscia Group
Mr Jan Bervar, Architect, Conscia Group

Moderated by Ms Ajša Vodnik, CEO, AmCham Slovenia

8.45–9.30
Gathering
@Bled Festival Hall

9.30–10.00
Opening
@Bled Festival Hall

Welcome address by H.E. Mr Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia
Keynote address by H.E. Mr Boštjan Koritnik

On-site sessions continued on next page.
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. DIGITAL SPEAKER

Mr Casper Nykjaer, Vice-President for European Affairs, Microsoft DIGITAL SPEAKER

Mr Juhun Lepassaar, Executive Director, EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) DIGITAL SPEAKER

Mr Karel Řehka, Director, National Cyber and Information Security Authority (NLKBI), Czech Republic DIGITAL SPEAKER

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

Ambassador Heli Tiirmaa-Klaar, Ambassador-at-Large for Cyber Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia DIGITAL SPEAKER

Keynote listener: Ms Kaja Ciglič, Senior Director, Digital Diplomacy, Microsoft

Moderated by 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

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

Mr Andrej Vizjak, 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.
SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

ON-SITE SESSIONS

Comb AmCham Business Breakfast: Collaboration between Businesses, State, Civil Society and Academia as the Right Response to the New Normal

Mr. Igor Cesarec
Research Economist, Citigroup. Dr Cesarec is vice-president of the union of Slovenian economic and financial research at Citigroup 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 Biever
Jan Biever is a group security architect with Conscia Group and NL 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 Philpaz
Senior Director, Amber Fund. Mr. Philpaz joined Amber Infrastructure in February 2020 with a wealth of experience in the management of regulated financial 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 Zgrabič
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 Zgrabič 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.

Moderated by Ms Ajla 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.

Opening

Welcome address by H.E. Dr Anže Logar
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic 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 2013 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.

Chaired 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 Adviser to the Foreign Minister and Chief Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister. He holds a degree in political science.

Leaders’ Panel: Europe after Brexit and COVID-19

Video address by Mr Thomas Bach
President of the International Olympic Committee since September 2013. Mr 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 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 Faculty of Law in Belgrade.

H.E. Mr Andrej 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 I and II 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 Nikola Petrovski
International Broadcaster and Visiting Professor, King’s College, London. 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 Nick Gowing, BBC World Debate, Dateline London, and locally covered major global stories. Mr Gowing co-authored the interim findings of the “Thinking the Unthinkable” study to wide acclaim and was awarded Honorary Doctorates by Exeter University and Bristol University.

Foreign Ministers Session

H.E. Mr Janaz Janša
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr Janša was the Slovenian Prime Minister from 2004 to 2008 and from 2012 to 2013. He also served as the Minister for Defense between 1990 and 1994, as well as in 2000. He has been the president of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) since 1993 and is currently the Vice-President of CD!–JDC. In 2008 he held the EU Council Presidency.

H.E. Mr Mateusz Morawiecki
Prime Minister 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 Viktor Orbán
Prime Minister of Hungary. 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 Democratic International. Mr Orbán graduated in law at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, and studied Political Philosophy at Oxford.

H.E. Mr Andrej Plenković
Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia. After his first term (2016–2020), he was re-elected as Prime Minister for the second term after winning parliamentary elections in July 2020. He was elected as President of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) 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 is State Secretary for the 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.

Moderated by Dr Bogan Lucian Aurescu
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania. Mr Aurescu is a career diplomat holding the rank of ambasador. 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. MrJosep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. He previously served as Spanish Foreign Minister (2018-2019) and as President of the European Parliament (2004-2007) of which he was a Member in the 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 Grilz Radman
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Started diplomatic career at the Croatian Foreign Service in the early 1990’s, 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 Korluk
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Mr Korluk is a career diplomat, and has served as Ambassador in Berlin and Washington, and as Permanent Representative to the EU. As “Ministre d’État”, he represented the Slovak government in the NATO and EU Council during the presidency of the Council of the EU.

H.E. Dr Andreia Lagar
(See Opening)

H.E. Dr Tomáš Petříček
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Before joining the diplomatic service, Dr Petříček 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 PhD in International Relations from Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences.

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, party’s first Vice-President. He was a member of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2014, as Member of State for Foreign Affairs and External Economic Relations.

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 UNICEF’s podcast Awake at Night, which won the silver at the British Podcasting Awards 2019. She has reported from more than 120 countries throughout Europe, the Middle East and the United States.

Conversation with Mr Miroslav Lajčák
Mr Miroslav Lajčák
European Union Special Representative for the Balkans, Pražská-Podštěnina Dialogue and Other Western Balkan Regional Issues. Mr Lajčák is a career diplomat. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at the Federal Foreign Office and as Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Georgia. During her diplomatic career she has been posted to Washington, New York and Ankara. She holds an MA in Humanities, International Politics, and Social Sciences from Haverford University.

Mr Pawel Hercznak
Managing Director for CSIP and Crisis Response, European External Action Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Mr Hercznak is a senior Polish diplomat and has served as Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations, Deputy Director of the Department of European Union and Department of Africa and the Middle East in the Polish Foreign Ministry and Deputy Representative of Poland to NATO’s Political Committee.

Dr Matthew Rhodes
Professor of National Security and Asia-Pacific Studies Chair at the George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. His research interests include U.S. foreign and security policy, transatlantic relations, and Central and Southeast European security issues. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Wisconsin.

Mataj Tonin, M. Sc.
is, since March 2020, the Head of the Secretary General for Defense and Vice-Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. He has been active in politics since 2001 when he joined the NSI party at the municipal level. He was a member of the National Assembly for the period 2015-2018 and from 2011 to 2013, when he was, for the first time, elected to the National Assembly. During almost ten years in the Parliament he was Leader of the Opposition Group, Group Chair of the Commission for the Supervision of Intelligence and Security Services, 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.
Digitalization as the Driver of Economic Recovery in CEE

Keynote address by Mr Zdravko Povž

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Keynote address by Mr Zdravko Povž

Master’s Degree in Contemporary European Politics from the University of Sussex.

Presentation of the BSF Distinguished Partner Award 2020

Mr Tone Kajzer, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr Kajzer is a career diplomat and economist 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, in 2009, as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. In 2012, he held the position of State Secretary at the Office of Prime Minister.

Ambassador Taula Yoldtja, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on behalf of the OSCE (See European Security and Asymmetric Threats).

Moderated by Ms Katja Mohar Bastar
Director of Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia, a one-stop shop facilitating digitalization and digital transformation, and thus creating an inclusive environment for collaboration in projects designed to support the Slovenian economy and society. Ms Mohar Bastar coordinates the strategic working group for regulation and environment in the Slovenian Digital Coalition. She has gained more than 15 years of experience in telecommunication regulations when working at the national regulatory authority and in the section of electronic communications operators. She believes in developing a digital environment with a business and social mentality.

Mr Richard Harnett
Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Chris- tiania (NOR), Co-director of the Ohio Cyber Ranges Institute, Chair of the Center for Cyber Strategy and Policy, and author of over fifty publications on international relations theory and international security studies. In 2016, he served as the first scholar-in-residence at US Cyber Command and National Security Agency, facilitating the development of the strategy of persistent engagement; he continues to provide direct advisory support. He also holds a professional lecturership as full Professor of International Relations at the Diplomatic Academy, Vienna, Austria.

Mr Tjaž Matko
Managing Director of the Atomske Toplice Development and Technology. Mr Matko has focused on the implementation of measures to mitigate the effects of nuclear and radiological accidents, and as a negotiator for the Slovenian Independence War. He graduated from the College of Police Administration and holds a Research Doctorate in Neuroscience. As State Secretary at the Ministry of the Environment, 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, in 2009, as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. In 2012, he held the position of State Secretary at the Office of Prime Minister.

Mr Christian Pavlu
Head of Strategy, Portfolio and Sales, Sandoz. Mr Pavlu is primarily responsible for Business and Competitive Insights, Global Portfolio and Sandoz Transformation. Previously, he worked for McKinsey & Company for four and a half years, and spent two years at the Therafis Crystalline Solutions startup. Mr Pavlu holds a Research Doctorate in Neuroscience from the University of Freiburg.

Mr Simon Žajc
State Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia. As Minister, and previously as State Secretary at the Ministry of the Environment in 2016-2020, he has focused on the implementation of measures to mitigate the effects of climate change, on the rehabilitation of brownfield areas in Slovenia and on responding to the challenges of waste management in Slovenia. Mr Žajc graduated from the Faculty of Forestry and Security Studies in 2003, obtaining a degree in criminal justice and security.

Ms Kaja Ciglič
Senior Director, Digital Government, Microsoft. Ms Ciglič leads Microsoft’s work on digital peace, focusing on encouraging international peace and security. Previously, she worked on the company’s international cybersecurity policy. Before joining Microsoft, she led the APCO Worldwide’s technology policy team. She holds a BSc in International Relations and History, and an MSc in European Politics, both from the London School of Economics.

Ms Kaja Ciglič
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Moderated by Mr Karel Šumperk
Director of National Cyber and Information Security Agency, Czech Republic. Mr Šumperk has long been engaged with military information operations and hybrid warfare for the Ministry of Defence, the Special Forces Group and became its commanding officer in 2010. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the Czech Army in March 2020. He served as Deputy Commander of the Multinational Division Northeast. He was appointed to the Director of National Cyber and Information Security Agency afterwards.

Ms Ciglič leads Microsoft’s work on digital peace, focusing on encouraging international peace and security. Previously, she worked on the company’s international cybersecurity policy. Before joining Microsoft, she led the APCO Worldwide’s technology policy team. She holds a BSc in International Relations and History, and an MSc in European Politics, both from the London School of Economics.

Dr Marko Grobelnik
Expert researcher in the field of Artificial Intelligence at Jožef Stefan Institute. He has co-founded the UNESCIO International Enterprise and was named Manager of the Year in 2010.

Mr Dror Swete
Director of the Cyber Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (DIAS). Mr Swete is an all-round professional in the fields of defence and security studies, conflict analysis, and information/communications security. He has extensive experience in lecturing and teaching in the field of intelligence and security, and is recognized as an expert in the fields of cyber defence, and information/communications security.

Mr Karel Šumperk
Director of National Cyber and Information Security Agency, Czech Republic. Mr Šumperk has long been engaged with military information operations and hybrid warfare for the Ministry of Defence, the Special Forces Group and became its commanding officer in 2010. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the Czech Army in March 2020. He served as Deputy Commander of the Multinational Division Northeast. He was appointed to the Director of National Cyber and Information Security Agency afterwards.

Mr Arne Schönbaum
President of the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), Germany, since February 2016. From 2008 to 2016, he was Chief Executive Officer of BLICT, Digital Security Group (BSI AG), which advises companies and public authorities in the fields of digitalization, cybersecurity and data protection. Between 1995 and 2008, he held several senior positions within EADS Germany, now Airbus, including that of Vice President Corporate and Defence Solutions for EADS Secure Networks. He is also the author of various publications, including “Deutschlands Sicherheit – Cybercrime und Cyberwaffe”.
researching owing to his fruitful academic career at the Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ljubljana. In 2000, he joined the Defence Studies Division as a 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 Vizjak
Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr Vizjak 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 Municipality 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 Ladeja Godina Košir
Chair of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform Conference (CEESP) and Founder of Circular Change. Ms Godina Košir is an internationally recognized Circular Economy Leader; the Finalist of The Circular Awards / WEF 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 a 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 Acceleratio, Mr van Eijk was the initiator of the first International Green Deal “The North Sea Resources Roundabout” and co-initiator of the Nederland Circulari Programme. He also supported UNIDO in setting up a CE strategy. Previously, he served as Director of strategy and PA at multinational corporation SIUEZ 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 Kovács PhD
Secretary-General of the BIDEAST Initiative. Mr Kovács 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.

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 stakeholders to ensure a systemic design and approach.

Ms Janja Kreitmayer 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 Kreitmayer 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 Iskratom- co. Ms Markizeti has 20 years of experience in sustainable development strategies. Iskratomeco 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 GlobalGoals Forum in Berlin in 2019.

Mr Gregor Skender
Manager at Deloitte Slovenia. With ten years of work experience in private and public sectors, Mr Skender 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 Skender also obtained the title of Master of Business Studies – MBA at the Univer- sity of Ljubljana.

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.