



**Conference Report** 2020





**BSF**

**Bled  
Strategic  
Forum**

**Challenges and Opportunities in the  
Post-COVID-19 World:**

Neighbours – Regions – Global World:  
Partners or Rivals?

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Monday, 31 August 2020

Bled, Slovenia





# Foreword

Kindly allow me to congratulate the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) team for the exceptional job they have done this year in exceptional circumstances.

They worked tirelessly to show Europe and the world that human resilience, determination, responsibility and solidarity are stronger than a virus, which has fundamentally, and I hope only temporarily, redefined our social interactions and exposed all the flaws of the current multilateral system. On the other hand, it has also highlighted the need for closer regional cooperation in order to efficiently and successfully address the challenges, threats and issues of today and tomorrow.

In the same context, allow me to thank our loyal partners, who believed in us and in the forum itself. It has been a tough year for everyone, but especially for events like the BSF, who had to redefine their goals and find their purpose in this ever-changing international environment.

Why do it, then? Why go through all this trouble in order to bring people to Bled, Slovenia?

Despite having managed to adapt and find a way to stay in contact through digital platforms and other instruments, no matter what we do, we will never be able to replace genuine personal interactions, conversations and intimacy, which appear simply by having people in the same room.

That is the primary reason we organised the event in the same manner as every year before. While taking extraordinary care for the health and safety of our participants, we tried to re-create this atmosphere of live, interactive and sometimes harsh discussions, which are needed now much more than ever, in order to successfully understand and address the most important issues the European and transatlantic community is facing.

Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most critical issues that leaders discussed at the BSF but by no means the only one. Although it seemed like the world stopped moving in 2020, the challenges, issues and questions that were already troubling us before the pandemics did not miraculously disappear; they are still waiting to be discussed and hopefully to be resolved.

In the midst of everything, one question of particular importance is looming over the BSF and us all: having a constructive and frank debate about the future of our continent, about the future of Europe.

Slovenia wishes to remain an important part of this debate. In the second half of 2021, we shall assume the Presidency of the Council of the EU. We will continue to push for a transparent, resilient, effective and inclusive Europe, which will be able to play a meaningful and responsible role in this new global geostrategic environment.

The BSF will also be present, just as it has been for its past 15 editions since 2006. To help ask the tough questions, to try to find answers and solutions to the most important issues, to promote solidarity, resilience and responsibility in our region, Europe and globally.

Stay safe and stay healthy.

**Peter Grk**  
Secretary-General  
of the Bled Strategic Forum

## Combo AmCham Business Breakfast:

# Collaboration between Businesses, State, Civil Society and Academia as the Right Response to the New Normal

*In partnership with AmCham Slovenia.*

Any state wishing to rise to the challenges of the new reality will have to be a state with active citizenship, innovative business practices, agile public administration, and trusted academia and experts. In today's world facing a dynamic shift, with fundamental changes in everyday life, business, and management, cooperation is a core value driving the progress of any modern society. Having an open dialogue and a good model of broad stakeholder participation yields progress, innovation, fast decisions, proactivity and security, and what is more, guarantees the country a competitive edge and ensures a high quality of life.

### Guiding Questions

Which countries have the best models of such cooperation and are considered success stories at the global level?

What is the level of stakeholder cooperation in the region and worldwide?

What constitutes successful cooperation and what are the main ingredients for success?

What can we do to improve cooperation at the national level and beyond?

### Policy Takeaways

**TRUST** | Trust between all parts of our societies is of the utmost importance. More trust needs to be put in experts, even more so in time of the pandemic and the ensuing uncertainty. In addition, governments must also trust their people more. Achieving trust will enable us to take the step forward and take cooperation and collaboration to the next level.

**COOPERATION** | Effective and successful cooperation of governments and private investors can deliver good value and new infrastructure. Despite unpredictability on the global level, cooperation on the regional level should be strengthened – the market, state, civil society and academia are highly interdependent.

**COMMUNICATION** | The rigorous work of the experts needs to be communicated to the general public in a proper manner. Through effective communication, we will also be able to work on tools and methods for forecasting how coronavirus is going to spread. Cybercrime and fake news connected to the pandemic have risen dramatically and we must deploy tools to fight them.

**TRANSFORMATION** | The pandemic has accelerated mega trends that were already under way, including digital transformation. In many areas, technology can help the world to recover from crisis faster.

**Jan Bervar**, Cyber Security Architect, Conscia Group

**Igor Cesarec**, Vice President, Global Economics Research, Citigroup; Founder and President, Emeritus, Association VTIS

**Jure Leskovec**, Associate Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University

**Jonathan Moore**, Senior Bureau Official, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, United States Department of State

**Joe Philipsz**, Senior Director, Amber Fund

**Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen**, Deputy Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Igor Zgrabljić**, Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager, Google CEE **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

Moderated by **Ajša Vodnik**, CEO, AmCham Slovenia



# BSF Opening Highlights History of Forum, Challenges

“We should not be surprised by the current challenges in the international environment,” Minister Logar opened the 15th Bled Strategic Forum. “The pandemic has amplified them and sped them up, but it did not create them from scratch. The way we handle the pandemic reflects the altered world that was already there.” This is being reflected in unilateral actions, the disregard for the established international order, law and commitments and in questioning our model of governance.

“The EU, our second home, has been struggling too ... A more assertive role on the global political stage remains a challenge.” He underlined that Slovenia firmly believed that the continuation of the EU enlargement process towards the Western Balkans should be a part of the vision of a union that radiates its attractive power. With global international cooperation weakened, the tendency goes towards smaller, regional frameworks, the Minister said.

He also highlighted the importance of European security, saying it does “not exist without the transatlantic alliance, even when we do not see exactly eye to eye or have competing interests. Security, together with values and democratic standards, is the cornerstone of our partnership.”

President Pahor said that Slovenia wished to be “at the core of a more integrated, developed and enlarged EU”; at the same time, being a member of the Euro zone and the Schengen area, Slovenia is bound to strive for a deeper and more united EU. He also noted that regional initiatives for closer cooperation are legitimate and useful but should never be at odds with the efforts for a better integrated, unified and more efficient EU.

Former Minister Rupel, who was in office when the idea for the BSF was born in 2005, reflected on the origins of the event and Slovenia’s foreign policy path since then; commenting on the complaints of some commentators “that the Slovenian government, by associating itself with the presumably less prestigious groups of central-eastern and south-eastern countries, was abandoning its core position, i.e. the cosy compartment on the so-called German and French train.”, he said that “These critics do not see that our solidarity with the new democracies never excluded our ambitions to travel with a TGV train.”

The forum had hosted “the most prominent political figures, brightest scholars and progressive businessmen to better understand the world we live in. Not out of altruism but out of necessity.”, Secretary-General Grk, looked back on the 15 past years of the event. He described the modern era as one of crisis management. “And the BSF has never backed down from a challenge or from a crisis.”

**Anže Logar**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

**Borut Pahor**, President of the Republic of Slovenia

**Dimitrij Rupel**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Chaired by **Peter Grk**, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum, Slovenia



Photo: Tarmino Petelinišek, Nebojša Tejčić | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# Leaders' Panel: Europe after Brexit and COVID-19

Prime Minister Janša said that the real challenges Europe faces are different from those which are being discussed, a reference to extensive debates in recent years about rule of law proceedings against Hungary and Poland. Prime Minister Plenković added that during the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU no signal that anything was wrong with our values and policies had been received. "The EU's fundamental freedoms were well implemented, except for the freedom of services, an area where Eastern European countries can have a competitive edge," noted Prime Minister Morawiecki.

Prime Minister Babiš added that rapid action was needed to solve Brexit, bilateral relations with Russia and Turkey, the trade deficit with China and to strike a trade agreement with the US. In general, he stressed that the EU needed to work hard on trade "We desperately need trade agreements." President Vučić dismissed the notion that Serbia was not very keen on joining the bloc. He said it remained committed to the European path but expected more respect from the EU.

To affirm Europe's position on the global stage Prime Minister Orbán called for a three-pronged approach: work on technological development, military capabilities, and enlargement to complete its security architecture. "To have the best technology, you need a military background and Europe is totally out of that competition."

Touching on the response to the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Borissov urged that the EU should now come up with a common medical protocol so that Member States react in unison. Participating via video link, President of the Council of Ministers Conte acknowl-

edged that it was sometimes difficult to coordinate so many countries, but noted that, in the past, crises sometimes represented a powerful impetus to shape a stronger and more cohesive European response.

"A crisis like no other has generated a response like no other from leaders all over the world. What has been done has been phenomenal," said Managing Director Georgieva while emphasizing the global response to the pandemic, which instils optimism. She also applauded the combined global fiscal stimulus of eleven trillion dollars to counter the effects of the pandemic and avoid a massive wave of bankruptcies.

"We need more solidarity – solidarity within society and solidarity among societies... Solidarity is at the heart of the Olympic Games. In these times, Olympic values can give us all good guidance." stressed President Bach in his video address.

Video address by **Thomas Bach**, President, International Olympic Committee (IOC)

**Andrej Babiš**, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

**Bojko Borissov**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

**Giuseppe Conte**, President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Kristalina Georgieva**, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund (IMF) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Janez Janša**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

**Mateusz Morawiecki**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland

**Viktor Orbán**, Prime Minister of Hungary

**Andrej Plenković**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

**Aleksandar Vučić**, President of the Republic of Serbia

Moderated by **Nik Gowing**, International Broadcaster and Visiting Professor, King's College, United Kingdom



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# Cooperation in the Focus of the Foreign Ministers Session

“The pandemic was a catalyst that brought players together and showed the importance of communication,” said High Representative Borrell Fontelles. He added that the pandemic showed that the EU could be creative, a case in point being the Recovery Fund, an idea that would not have been acceptable a year ago.

Minister Korčok added to this by saying the EU has provided help in addition to individual country action, “while the EU was not able to provide masks when the pandemic reached the continent, the EU is now leading Member States out of the crisis with the Recovery Fund.”

Representing Germany, currently at the helm of the EU Council, Minister of State Müntefering, at the German Federal Foreign Office, said via video link from Berlin that the pandemic was a top priority of the German presidency and expressed the belief that the EU would emerge stronger from this crisis.

Another aspect of the crisis, “namely how fast the EU could revert to nation states” was highlighted by Minister Petříček.

However, when asked whether nation states or the EU would emerge stronger from this crisis, panellists expressed reservations about putting this in antagonistic terms. Minister Rau labelled this an artificial conflict, adding that only strong member states made for a strong EU, while Minister Grlić Radman said that member states and the EU needed each other.

Attention was also drawn to the urgent need to fight misinformation in order to become more effective in fighting the pandemic. Going forward, it will be key to support the EU’s economy, the panellists agreed, with Minister Szijjártó expressing the belief that the bloc should relax its strict State aid for businesses to help preserve jobs, and in turn, drive demand to fuel the economy.

Minister Logar also stressed the importance of the economy, noting that “It is necessary to invest in projects that will have added value in the future.” Slovenia’s programme for its EU presidency next year includes a simplification of procedures for the drawing of EU funds.

**Josep Borrell Fontelles**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World

**Gordan Grlić Radman**, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia

**Ivan Korčok**, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

**Anže Logar**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

**Michelle Müntefering**, Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Tomáš Petříček**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

**Zbigniew Rau**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

**Péter Szijjártó**, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary

Moderated by **Bethany Bell**, Foreign Correspondent, BBC News



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# Conversation with Miroslav Lajčák, EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and Other Western Balkan Regional Issues

Just as the Western Balkans are part of the European story, so are the problems of the region also the bloc's problems, said Special Representative Lajčák at a special one-on-one panel.

An expert on the region who has been dealing with its issues for over 20 years, he took over his new position in April, and the most prominent feature of his 12-month term is improving relations between Serbia and Kosovo. He stressed that normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations was a process.

The appointment is a signal from the EU that regional issues, including EU enlargement, are one of the bloc's priorities, highlighting that "the previous EU Commission did not deal with the region in a proper way". It did not promote enlargement processes and there were several mistakes, including moving the goalposts and invoking the "us versus them" divide, which did not improve the situation in the region, Lajčák said, underlining the importance of a credible European perspective.

"If the EU wants to be a global actor [...], then we have to start demonstrating that we can help organise things in a European way on European soil."

He said that in a large part of the EU, particularly in the west, there was no enthusiasm for enlargement, but instead of just focussing on the technical details of the process, the EU should stop ignoring the political aspect of enlargement. It should bear in mind that any efforts to oppose enlargement are counter-productive and serve by example. He added that the vicious circle of a lack of trust between the Western Balkans leaders and the EU needed to be broken. Lajčák also said that "the EU helped the region generously in their fight against COVID-19".

Asked about the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU Special Representative said that it was difficult to find interlocutors due to the complicated structure of government in the country. He called for efforts to resolve the dilemma between the civic and ethnic principles in the country, highlighting that a European future enjoyed broad support in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regarding the normalisation of Kosovo-Serbia relations, he said that it was "a process and not an act", pointing out that improving the relations was vital. He added that setting a timeline would not be productive, neither would dragging the process, and he welcomed any initiatives from third parties as long as they helped. Such a normalisation would speed up European integration for both Serbia and Kosovo, he said, highlighting that meeting European standards was a must.

"There is no ideal model, but the EU is the best of the existing models," he concluded.

**Miroslav Lajčák**, EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and Other Western Balkan Regional Issues

Moderated by **Peter Grk**, Secretary-General of the Bled Strategic Forum, Slovenia

BSF



Photo: Nebojša Tejić | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# European Security and Asymmetric Threats

*In partnership with the George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia.*

Since the end of the Cold War, the European security architecture has never been under more stress than today. The security environment in Europe is also being altered by an increasing entanglement of conventional and nuclear systems and the existence of the destabilising “escalate-to-win” doctrine. COVID-19 has contributed to the existing challenges by causing a suspension of verification activities and confidence and security-building measures while encouraging disinformation campaigns. This proliferation of hybrid threats is exacerbated by the refusal of some actors to even acknowledge them.

## Guiding Questions

What is the future of arms control in Europe?

How can a meaningful dialogue on asymmetric threats be established among different actors?

What are the prospects for a post-COVID-19 European security architecture?

Can increased cooperation between the EU and NATO provide the necessary answers?

## Policy Takeaways

**ADJUST TO THE NEW REALITIES** | An adjustment of the defence and security policy will be needed, including because of cyber threats and the COVID-19 pandemic. The combining of know-how and capabilities needs to be executed more effectively.

**NEW & HYBRID THREATS** | There is a need to adapt on several levels because of hybrid threats, the need to downsize operations because of the pandemic, and

to introduce new and non-traditional areas of defence. We should also not allow the health crisis to turn into a security crisis.

**EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS** | US commitment to Europe is real, and combat training and readiness activity are at an appropriate level. To strengthen NATO, the EU needs to take more responsibility for its own security while the US should serve as a reinforcement. Use should be made of the OSCE’s experience as a tool for dialogue.

**WESTERN BALKANS** | Identified as the area in Europe of greatest concern due to the interests of big geopolitical players, i.e. Russia and China. While some actors want to present themselves as saviours, e.g. in their response to the pandemic, their approaches tend to be more economic and could be regarded as attempts to take over infrastructure in Europe. Integrate the region into Europe more deeply.

**Matthew G. Boyse**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State

**Christopher Cavoli**, Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe

**Bettina Cadenbach**, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

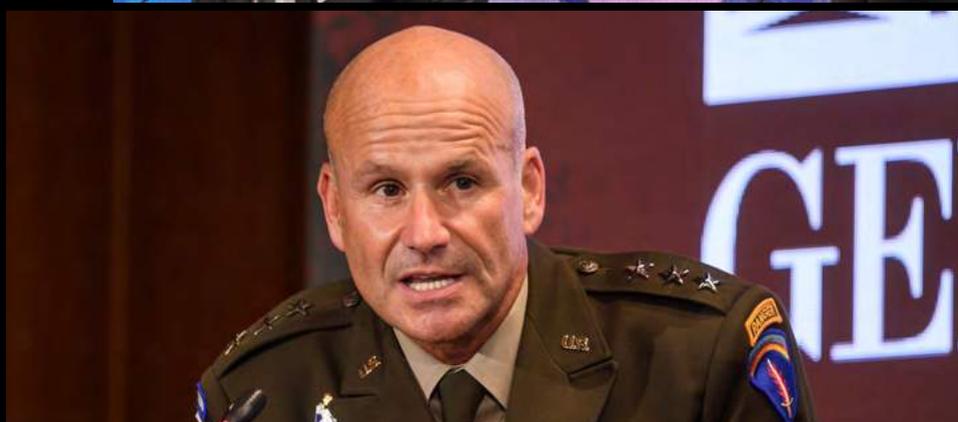
**Pawel Herczynski**, Managing Director for CSDP and Crisis Response, European External Action Service (EEAS) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Matthew Rhodes**, Professor of National Security Studies and Area Studies Chair, Marshall Center

**Matej Tonin**, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia

**Tuula Yrjölä**, Officer-in-Charge/Secretary General, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Moderated by **Iztok Mirošič**, Ambassador-at-Large/ Special Envoy of the Minister and BSF Programme Director, Slovenia



# Digitalisation as the Driver of Economic Recovery in CEE

*In partnership with Google and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia.*

The COVID-19 crisis is fast-tracking digital transformation across the globe, and especially in Europe affected by extended lockdown periods. Even amidst immediate crisis management, governments have mobilised more resources than before to support digitalisation as they see its immediate benefits. Countries that are skilful in exploiting digitalisation and move decisively in this direction may be able to come out of the crisis better positioned both in terms of the economy and in terms of their international influence. Crucially, the CEE region has unique fundamentals in digital growth that persist despite the crisis. It possesses a deep talent pool, robust digital infrastructure, which has proven itself during the past weeks, and vibrant tech ecosystems while lacking legacy technologies.

## Guiding Questions

Can digitalisation be the key driver of growth in the CEE? What are the key barriers preventing such a development?

How will the new post-COVID-19 geopolitical and economic realities influence digitalization in the region?

## Policy Takeaways

**EMBRACE THE MOMENTUM** | During the pandemic, bigger advances were made in some areas in four months that would have taken four years otherwise – disruptions have always propelled science forward. Digitalisation in CEE especially relevant due to the size of domestic markets limits growth opportunities.

**A WIDE ARRAY OF APPLICATIONS** | Healthcare, companies' financial and production planning, e-commerce, remote working and learning and many more. Through digitalisation and collective action, we can build economies that deliver inclusive economic growth, prosperity and safety for all.

**PROVIDE SUPPORT** | Quality education and good infrastructure are promising foundations for effective digitalisation. Digital transformation can help recovery in the post-COVID-19 world – SMEs as the backbone of the economy present huge potential in this regard.

**ADDRESS CONCERNS** | Trust-building as a key element for success, including in terms of interoperability and in regional cooperation. A new social contract will be needed due to AI changing the job market in some segments in "ways that will require a slightly different distribution of wealth". Digital transformation should not become a tool for the "enemies of democracy and human rights."

Keynote address by **Zdravko Počivalšek**, Minister of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia

**Marko Grobelnik**, Expert Researcher, Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, Jožef Stefan Institute

**Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen**, Deputy Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Joško Mrndžec**, Country Manager Adriatics Region, Google **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Christian Pawlu**, Head of Strategy, Portfolio and BD&L, Sandoz

**Tiit Riisalo**, Director of the Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia

**Simon Zajc**, State Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia

Moderated by **Katja Mohar Bastar**, Director, Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia



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Photo: Nebojša Tejić | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# Is the Future of Cyberspace Only as a Domain of Conflict?

*In partnership with Microsoft and the Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia.*

Technology has become central to our lives, particularly as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world is shifting to digital faster than ever before; digital technologies enable employees to work remotely, advance medical research, facilitate distance learning for schools, and help maintain relationships. However, there are some who seek to take advantage of this expanded reliance on technology.

## Guiding Questions

What can be done to protect our critical assets?

What are some of the best practices to prevent, discourage, deter and respond to cyber threats?

How governments can join forces with the private sector and what can be done at the international level to hold perpetrators accountable?

## Policy Takeaways

**SET UP INFRASTRUCTURE** | Building resilient infrastructure and cybersecurity units is of crucial importance. Information security is an important precondition for successful digital transformation.

**INCREASE COOPERATION** | Cooperation between private and public sectors is on the rise, while responsibility still rests on first-line responders, i.e. digital companies. Cyberspace is about strategic competition rather than conflict – we must learn to manage competition and how to “anticipate the exploitation of vulnerability and take away the attack before it happens”.

**PROTECT CRITICAL ASSETS** | There had been a significant increase in attempted and real cyberattacks on more than one sector, whereby hospitals and research institutions were an initial target during the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have not yet seen cyber-incidents that have exceeded the threshold of armed conflict, this might yet be the case.

**IMPROVE LEGISLATION** | Europe has been able to build up a security framework and find strategies to raise the overall level of security but work remains to be done. States are expected to behave responsibly in cyberspace and observe existing international law.

Keynote address by **Boštjan Koritnik**, Minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia  
**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**

**Casper Klyngje**, Vice-President for European Government Affairs, Microsoft **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Juhan Lepassaar**, Executive Director, EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) **DIGITAL SPEAKER**

**Karel Řehka**, Director, National Cyber and Information Security Authority (NÚKIB), Czech Republic

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

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

Keynote listener:

**Kaja Ciglič**, Senior Director, Digital Diplomacy, Microsoft

Moderated by **Uroš Svete**, Director, Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (ISA)





**Presentation of the BSF Distinguished Partner Award 2020**

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

**Tuula Yrjölä**, Officer-in-Charge / Secretary General, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on behalf of the OSCE



**Closing Remarks**

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



## DIGITAL SESSION:

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

*In partnership with Circular Change and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia.*

The year 2020 will be crucial for the implementation of sustainable agendas and goals agreed on the international level. A radical shift is needed to reinvent our economy and society in a prosperous and resilient way, as well as systemic change addressing the environmental, social and economic dimensions. Collaboration and co-creation should be in the core of our activities.

### Guiding Questions

Are we addressing health and climate crisis equally? Where do we stand regarding the implementation of the European Green Deal, Recovery Plan for Europe and Circular Economy Action Plan? What does Slovenia have to offer when talking about national and regional strategies? What can business teach politics?

### Policy Takeaways

**SYSTEMIC APPROACH** | The European Green Deal committed the European Commission to deliver an ambitious vision addressing climate and current health crisis as two parts of the same coin. This transformation can only be based on a systemic approach, changing the drivers of the socio-economic system based on an economy founded on societal needs. This kind of approach is also embedded in the high-level negotiation process for

COP26 as well as in multi-stakeholder circular economy activities on the ground.

**INTERDEPENDENCY** | In the time of the pandemic, we are experiencing our interdependency and interconnectedness on all levels. Radical collaboration is of crucial importance when reinventing new value systems, co-creating new business models, and designing new policy orientations and instruments. Europe's future shall be designed in a sustainable, inclusive way, leaving no one behind.

**RESILIENCE** | Recovery and sustainability require profound deliberation on the role of CEE bio-based resources, which can offer opportunities and benefits to reshape fossil-dependent economies into sustainable and circular ones. In the local-global context, the BIOEAST countries' bio economies could benefit European self-sufficiency. As key drivers of the recovery, green investments could aid the transformation into fair, prosperous, resource-efficient and competitive economies.

Video addresses by **Tone Kajzer**, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia & **Nick Bridge**, Foreign Secretary's COP26 Envoy, Special Representative for Climate Change Foreign and Commonwealth Office

**Freek van Eijk**, Managing Director, Holland Circular Hotspot

**Ladeja Godina Košir**, Chair, ECESP, and Founder of Circular Change, Slovenia

**Iain Gulland**, Chief Executive, Zero Waste Scotland

**Cliona Howie**, Head, Circular Economy Climate KIC

**Barna Kovacs**, Secretary-General, BIOEAST Initiative

**Janja Kreitmayer McKenzie**, Senior Policy Advisor at Ministry for the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia

**Mojca Markizeti**, Sustainability Manager, Iskraemeco, Slovenia

**Gregor Skender**, Manager, Deloitte Slovenia

**Andrej Vizjak**, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia

## DIGITAL SESSION:

# City Diplomacy and the Future of Multilateralism

*In partnership with Global Diplomacy Lab.*

Shortly after the UN's 75th anniversary and during one of the greatest health and economic crises, multilateralism appears weakened like never before. Meanwhile, international city connections emerge as an alternative and reliable source of global cooperation. Rapid urban population growth means that many of our global challenges – global migration, inequalities, climate change – are increasingly urban as well. However, city (or metro) diplomacy remains a nascent concept, lacking recognition and clarity within many cities, national governments, and international organisations.

### Guiding Questions

What is city diplomacy? How are cities and local governments engaging at the international level? What are the influence and impact of city diplomacy on addressing global challenges? What role can city diplomacy play in the future of multilateralism and international cooperation? In an increasingly urban future, how might the foreign policy of nation-states and the multilateral system evolve to integrate the leadership of cities?

### Policy Takeaways

**NATION-STATE MULTILATERALISM DOES NOT WORK ANYMORE** | As COVID-19 hit, international organisations and global cooperation provided limited coherence and nation-states looked mostly inward. This limited global cooperation mirrors similar gridlock in collective responses to migration, climate change, and humanitarian situations. National agendas driven by populist ideology or unilateralism hinder multilateral efforts to address pressing transnational challenges.

**MAYORS AND LOCAL LEADERS ARE INCREASINGLY FILLING THE GAP** | Driven by pragmatism and the urgency of solving local issues, city leaders often share similar agendas regarding economic inequality, insecurity, environmental concerns, and migration. They also increasingly engage in diplomatic activities, bilaterally, or through city-led networks such as C40 Cities and the Urban 20. These networks provide platforms to share lessons, organize collective action, and coordinate city efforts to influence global agendas. Close to their citizens and benefiting from a higher level of popular trust compared to other levels of governance, the voice of city leaders matters in 21<sup>st</sup> century multilateralism.

**CITIES CANNOT ACT ALONE, NEW PARTNERSHIPS ARE NEEDED** | City leaders have limited powers. They act within the constraints of their jurisdiction and within the sovereignty of their nation-state. They also have limited fiscal capacities and resources, especially smaller and medium-sized cities. New mechanisms need to better elevate the voice of cities through national ministries of foreign affairs and international organisations like the UN and the G20. In the European Union, cities lobby for direct access to EU finance and funding. Cities can also build their own seat at the table and provide input for global policy discussion, like the Mayors Mechanism in the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

**Anya Margaret Baum**, Strategic Advisory to the Social Projects Department of the City of Warsaw  
**Nicolas Gharbi**, Principal Advisor for International Affairs to the Mayor of Madrid  
**Boštjan Udovič**, Associate Professor for Diplomatic Studies at the University of Ljubljana

Moderated by **Chi Nguyen**, Managing Director at Parker P. Consulting

Event concept and hosting by **Annegret Warth** and **Max Bouchet**



**RED PUTS  
YOU 1st**

**WE ARE ALL ABOUT YOU**



# NEW TOYOTA YARIS HYBRID

WHY STOP?



Average fuel consumption for Toyota Yaris Hybrid: 3,8 - 4,9 l/100 km and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: 87 - 112 g/km. Toyota Adria d.o.o. Brnčičeva 51, Ljubljana.

TOYOTA.SI

A Voyage Through Time: 2006 – 2019





Photo: Slovenian Press Agency (STA)





Photo: Slovenian Press Agency (STA)





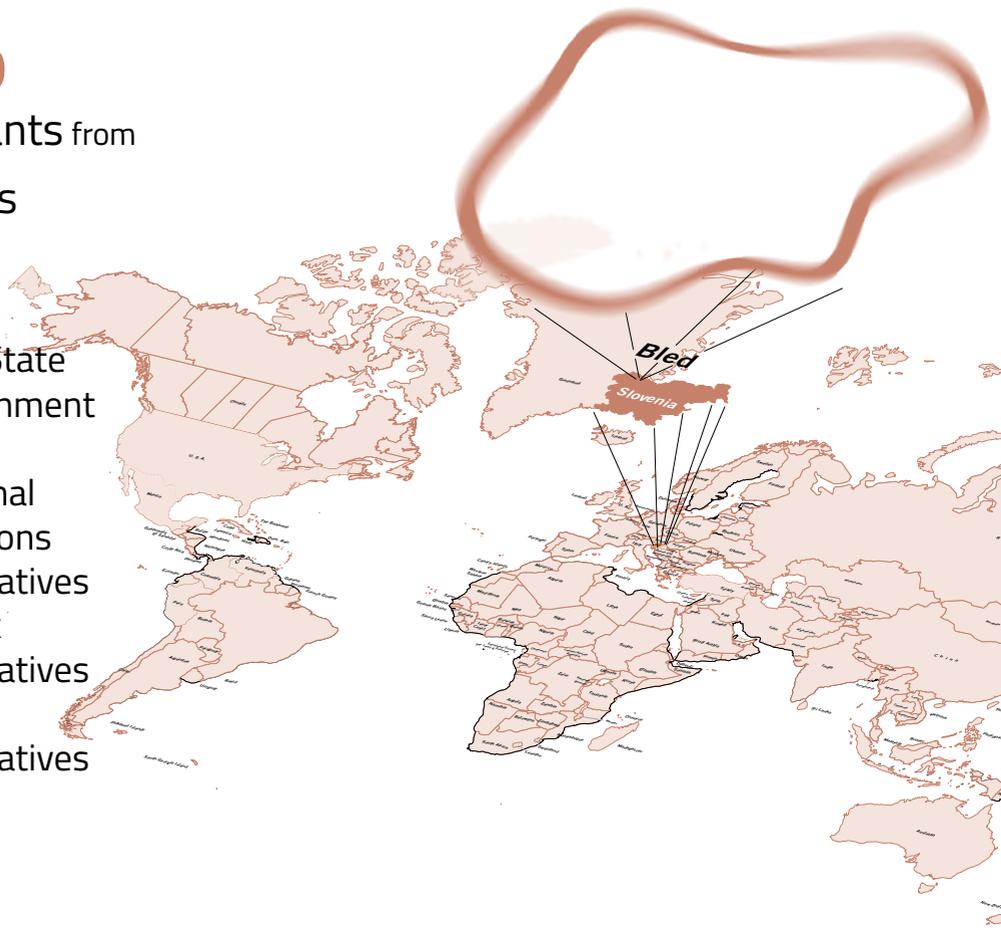
Photo: Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

# 2006 – 2020: Facts and Figures



Almost **10000**  
Participants from  
**100** Countries

Among them some  
**30** Heads of State  
and Government  
**300** Ministers  
**100** International  
Organizations  
Representatives  
**50** Think Tank  
Representatives  
**1300** Media  
Representatives



**2** Presidents



**7** Prime Ministers



**6** Ministers of Foreign Affairs



**4** Ministers



**16** Other High-level Representatives

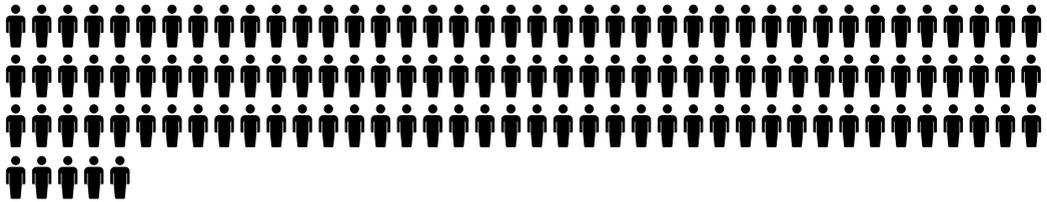


**6** International Organizations Representatives

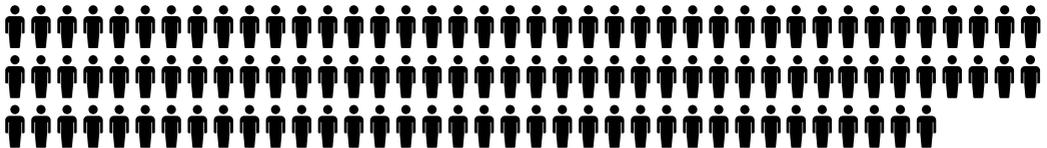


was the **2020 Bled Strategic Forum**  
**15<sup>th</sup>** in a row.

## 305 On-site Participants



## 296 Digital Participants



## 72 Speakers



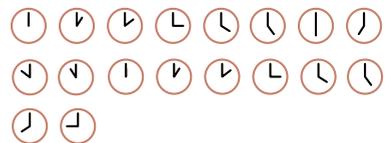
### 7 On-site Sessions



### 2 Digital Sessions



### 18+ Hours of Discussions



The event was supported by

## 29 Partners



# Postface

Over the course of the last 15 years, the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) has developed into one of the leading events in Central and Eastern Europe, attracting statespersons, policy-makers, business leaders, members of civil society and young leaders. The forum strives to be the most inclusive event of its kind and has continued to live up to that promise during this difficult year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic by enabling digital participation.

This past year has not only been a veritable challenge to our way of life in its own right but has also exacerbated certain processes and trends in the international arena. We are witnessing the further erosion of trust in multilateral institutions and the multilateral system. Furthermore, the gaps between the political West and East are ever greater, while integrity and a rules-based system espoused in the concept of international law are rapidly fading away. A world where facts can be made to fit whatever truth is convenient does indeed pose a unique set of challenges.

The BSF will encourage and continue to create opportunities for an open and frank exchange of opinions. It wholeheartedly embraces a variety of views and opinions, while those need to be based on knowledge and professionalism.

In 2021, we will be addressing the key areas of international affairs, security, digitalisation, and sustainability, as well as the development of new technologies.

We shall also continue holding discussions about our new geopolitical reality. Aggregation of power is becoming ever more crucial in international affairs. We are also witnessing increased regional cooperation

and seeking of partnerships to cope with the new realities. Within this challenging environment, Slovenia will be taking over the of the Presidency of the Council of the EU. We believe this to be a very precarious time for the EU in which crucial strategic decisions will be needed and will be key towards ensuring a safer and better future for all EU citizens.

In this context, the BSF will address these key areas and continue to shape the debate about our common future. The BSF values diversity, inclusiveness and, foremost, knowledge. We want to counter the flood of opinionated snippets of information distributed en masse and the peddling of simplistic answers which fail to address the needs and complex challenges of our times.

While the central event will remain our cornerstone, we are actively developing the BSF into a platform spanning the entire year, which will implement its vision and continuously contribute to and co-create policy discussions on pressing global topics throughout the year.

**Katja Geršak**

Executive Director

of the Centre for European Perspective



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

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**1 — 2 SEPT  
2021**

**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**

[www.bledstrategicforum.org](http://www.bledstrategicforum.org)

**#BSF2021**



BSF 2020 Organising Team & Volunteers / Photo: Tamino Petelínšek | Slovenian Press Agency (STA)



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## 2020 BLED STRATEGIC FORUM

Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-COVID-19 World:  
Neighbours – Regions – Global World: Partners or Rivals?

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