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Content

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THE POWER OF RULES OR THE RULES OF POWER

It's time for teamwork and solidarity

No one should be left behind when it comes to ensuring energy security

/ By Dr. Robert Golob, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

The European Union and the international community are on the brink of change that, more than ever, requires us to take united, determined and coordinated action. Tectonic geopolitical shifts, climate change, the bleak global economic outlook, and the issues of energy and food security are some of the complex global challenges set to hit the most vulnerable parts of the world the most.

Russia's aggression against the independent and sovereign Ukraine contravenes the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, which is based on the protection of international peace and security and the cultivation of friendly relations between nations. The Charter sets out the fundamental principles of international relations, including the prohibition on the use of force. Russia has committed a flagrant violation of this principle, choosing the rule of force and coercion to change borders.

The war in Ukraine very dramatically proves the importance of democracy and respect for the contemporary international order, one that was founded on the idea of a broad alliance among countries in a pledge for world peace. The outcome of this senseless war in our neighbourhood will no doubt shape the future of global security architecture and multilateralism, and test the resilience of the EU and the democratic order as such.

The invasion of Ukraine holds far-reaching consequences, not only for the residents of the country under attack but for the EU and the world as well. It is threatening the food and energy security of EU Member States, itself calling for comprehensive and effective solutions, while combatting high inflation and the impacts of climate change.

The war in Ukraine and a new bloc division of the world

The war in Ukraine is changing the geopolitical landscape of the world and having a profound effect on international security, including in the Western Balkans.

/ By Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia

The war in Ukraine is changing the geopolitical landscape of the world and having a profound effect on international security, including in the Western Balkans.

Ukraine, an internationally recognised, sovereign and independent state, is under attack by the Russian Federation, a great military force and a member of the United Nations Security Council. The largest European country is displaying military aggression against its neighbour, the second biggest country on the European continent. We are witness to the greatest military clash since the Second World War. The war has been underway for 6 months and it seems unlikely it will end any time soon. Both sides are trying to improve their respective military positions and attain a geostrategic starting point for peace talks. In this framework, it is important to commend every effort to reduce tensions, especially with regard to better management of the impact of the war on the global supply of food and energy products. Prior to the onset of the war, Slovenia was striving to maintain good relations with the Russian Federation as I strongly believed that good relations between the West and the Russian Federation are essential for peace in Europe. President Putin's decision to attack Ukraine was a surprise and, above all, a huge disappointment. His decision is a gross violation of international law and cooperation within the rule-based international order.

We still have time to construct a peaceful future

A legitimate, sustainable and just peace can be attained through diplomacy

/ By Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye

We are witnessing an era characterized by uncertainties, crises, and conflicts threatening peace and stability worldwide. Since the end of the Cold War, and especially over the past two decades, a wide spectrum of new threats emerged, testing not only Europe but the entire international system.

Do we still have enough time to learn from history and adjust our policies and strategies to construct a peaceful future? Or is it already too late?

The structures at the international level are being contested daily. Discussions on great power rivalries and challenges of the international system are on the rise again. The emergence of hybrid and cyber threats has taken us to a new reality where the rules of war and peace have been rewritten. Gray zones that can be defined as neither war nor peace abound.

Threat multipliers such as climate change, lack of food security, cyber threats and migration bring the concept of human security to the fore. Türkiye is at the very center of a region where these processes of change and crises are deeply felt.

In this complex equation, we experienced – and are still experiencing – two new major shocks in the last two years: the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine.

The pandemic reminded us once again of the importance of resilience and solidarity. It affected the entire world in a short span of time and further accelerated the major negative trends recently observed in international relations.

As we were just recovering from the negative effects of the pandemic, hoping and praying for a brighter future, we woke up to a war, which marked the return of geopolitics. The heart of Europe is facing the most severe crisis since the Second World War.

Türkiye is deeply feeling all the effects of this war that started between our two important neighbors in the Black Sea. From the very beginning, Türkiye supported the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and extended comprehensive humanitarian and political support. Security and stability in the Black Sea basin have been among our top priorities for decades.

The Black Sea, surrounded by 6 littoral states is a closed sea of strategic importance. Having the longest coastline in the Black Sea and being home to the Turkish Straits that connect the Black Sea to the rest of the world's oceans and seas, Türkiye has diverse interests in the region. It has always supported and worked for the continuation of peace and stability in the region. Türkiye qualified the Russian aggression as "war" at its inception and invoked Article 19 of the Montreux Convention accordingly.

This meant the closure of the Turkish Straits to the military vessels of the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Although non-belligerents are not affected by this decision, Türkiye has also advised all states not to undertake passages of warships through the Turkish Straits. This policy aimed at preventing the Black Sea area from turning into a military confrontation zone and it has been successful.

Furthermore, we have spared no effort to help bring an end to the war in Ukraine. We hosted the Ukraine-Russia talks as a facilitator in Antalya and Istanbul. Cognizant of the challenges posed by the rising energy costs, growing inflation and impending food crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine, we played a key expediting role in the UN plan for the safe export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. The deal for the export of Ukrainian grain reached in Istanbul on July 22 is a historic achievement and has been hailed as such globally.

The operation is conducted from the Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul, with the participation of Türkiye, Ukraine, Russia and the UN. We sincerely hope that both sides will abide by the word and the spirit of this agreement and that this initiative will also contribute to the resumption of meaningful dialogue among the parties with the aim of reaching a just peace.

The conflict is posing many political, economic and security challenges not only to Europe but also to the international community. We still believe that a legitimate, sustainable and just peace can be attained through diplomacy. To this end, we are resolved to continue our efforts to revive the diplomatic track between Russia and Ukraine.

Within the EU, external as well as internal challenges have sparked debates on the future of European integration. As the EU leaders pointed out at the Versailles Summit on March 11, the war is a "tectonic shift in European history".

It is clear that this is the very time to discuss the future of European security architecture.

Finland and Sweden's applications for NATO membership, Germany's increase in defense expenditures, Switzerland's approach to neutrality, "European Geopolitical/Political Community" debates, the EU granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and NATO's new Strategic Concept are among the important recent developments in this context.

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Our belief in humanity's ability to construct a better future remains as firm as our foreign policy principles and goals. Located in the midst of a volatile region, we are aware that the path towards a peaceful tomorrow is not smooth; but our intention is clear, while our determination is sincere and strong.

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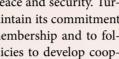
Türkiye has been a solid NATO ally for the last 70 years and considers the transatlantic link vital for peace and security. Türkiye continues to maintain its commitment to the goal of EU membership and to follow constructive policies to develop cooperation and dialogue in every field. If the EU wants to be a global actor – especially in view of today's volatile geopolitical environment – it has to find ways and means to face its responsibilities and live up to its commitments, including towards Türkiye.

To revisit the question of whether it is too late to construct a peaceful future, our answer is clear: It is never too late. But committed and sincere efforts are needed from all parties now if we are to leave behind a better world for future generations.

While rising up to the challenges posed by current developments, we need realistic assessments, policies, and solutions.

We cannot afford war and we still have the means to craft peace. Türkiye has been working and will continue to work hard to attain that peace. ◆

Challenging dilemmas in difficult times

Ensuring that the 'power of rules' prevail over the 'rules of power'

/ By Tanja Fajon, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Europe – and the world – is at crossroads and in the wake of Russia's attack on Ukraine many questions need to be addressed. The 17th edition of the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) continues to offer effective platform for open and honest discussions. Slovenian foreign policy – returning to the core EU and strong support for multilateralism – wants to be ambitious player in addressing numerous challenges the future brings. BSF will, as always, be of precious help in looking for solutions.

Destroyed homes, separated families, dead, disabled, young generations forever scattered, immeasurable economic loss and looming political tensions – these are the ramifications of the war in Ukraine. My visit to Kyiv in July once more reinforced my awareness of how fragile peace is. It should by no means be taken for granted.

The future, too, should not be taken for granted. Clichéd as this may sound, the future depends on us, on the will and vision of our countries, but above all on the respect for agreements and commitments.

This is also suggested by this year's title of the Bled Strategic Forum weighing up the relationship between the rule of power and the power of rules. If I had to choose, I would personally always opt for rules. A community, whether national or international, that respects democratically negotiated agreements and the legal order, is capable of demonstrating and exercising its power without resorting to any form of violence.

The crossroads at which the world, and Europe as part of it, stands in the wake of Russia's attack on Ukraine is complex and unpredictable. Geopolitical relations are changing. We are witnessing fundamental erosion of the multilateral world order's foundations and ever-growing security risks. And the road we choose will shape the future, especially for younger generations. My wish for the Bled Strategic Forum is therefore to continue providing space for open, honest discussions acting as the basis for effective responses to the current and future challenges. And they are plenty: ensuring security and peace, responsibility for climate and the environment, rising economic inequality, and management of the food and energy crises.

A time marked by crises cutting deep into society makes it all more important to promote reflection on shared values, regardless of our differences. These include the rule of law, respect for diversity, human rights, and the position of women and minorities. Shared values are the connecting tissue that has built, strengthened and will

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sustain the European Union, whatever the crises. And crises keep emerging; in the last decade alone, before the war in Ukraine, the EU experienced several crises – economic, financial, migration and also moral. These all created the conditions for the emergence and spread of nationalism, radicalism and populism, all challenging the fundamental values. Such attempts have been a clear indicator of what Europe must not tolerate. Nor does it want to.

Each and any of these crisis have so far confirmed that the power of the European Union depends on its cohesion and unity, resulting in a greater flexibility of our joint approach.

The EU's role is to strengthen its voice in the international arena and improve its capacity to act effectively and deal with problems quickly. It is clear that the EU must develop its strategic independence and, by forming partnerships, address worldwide challenges: the Balkans, Africa, Asia, transatlantic cooperation etc.

As a matter of priority, Slovenian foreign policy aims to refocus on and become more closely linked with the EU core. In practice, this means respecting European institutions and the EU's fundamental values, and strengthening the European identity, which includes active advocacy for European integration, EU enlargement and its more prominent presence on the global stage. A return to the core means a return to cherishing democracy, respecting the rule of law, exercising solidarity, and forging strong partnerships with like-minded.

No country can effectively address global challenges alone. There is a consensus that integration is vital. Yet, we continue to face a vital dilemma on how to achieve this goal: is it more sensible to strive for a general consensus at all times or allow a creation of separate tracks inevitably leading to a multi-speed EU. With regard to foreign policy, this dilemma also calls for a debate on decision-making by a qualified majority or by consensus.

The Forum will try to answer these and many other questions. This year, too, the panels and guests prove that the annual meeting in Bled has achieved a high profile and wide representation. We will also build on the regional forum dedicated to foreign-policy debates in the sphere of economic cooperation, which has the most direct impact on people's everyday life and is a tangible tool for increasing prosperity.

I believe that Slovenia can pursue an influential and innovative foreign policy within an effective multilateral system and organisational effort will be invested in the coming months. We need to inform not only the foreign but also the domestic public about the goals we intend to pursue and the ways in which we will contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, respect for human rights and international law, and the achievement of sustainable and inclusive development.

During my recent visit to New York, I reaffirmed Slovenia's commitment to contribute to more effectively addressing global challenges and mitigating the risks that are changing our reality. Protecting water as an instrument of peace in international relations is a good example of Slovenia's efforts for global progress. Our priorities include the protection of human rights in a just green transition and digital transformation, the protection of children in armed conflict, and the women's agenda for peace and security. We support the initiatives for global disarmament and conflict prevention. In July, Slovenia joined the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament, and I am delighted that it is led by two female foreign ministers.

As the first woman to head the foreign ministry in three decades of Slovenia's independence, let me conclude by expressing my support for women, their role and their position in the world. And this is another topic of discussion to which the Bled Strategic Forum will dedicate ample space. Personally, I will certainly work to ensure that women in politics, diplomacy, business, science and the world in general, especially in less developed countries, are given the role and recognition they deserve, as this is beyond any doubt a key element in the balance of power.

I wish everyone a very warm welcome to magnificent Lake Bled and many fruitful discussions! ◆

Energy security requires joint, European solutions

As Henry Kissinger stated, "foreign policy is the art of establishing priorities". Today, we can say that energy security and rising food and energy prices are the priority issues of all European governments. And if ever, in these challenging times solidarity must not simply be a word but also entail the supportive actions and attitudes of all EU Member States.

Countries will be tempted to close themselves off as they search for independent solutions. However, individual or national solutions will not guarantee energy security. We need joint, European solutions based on cooperation and solidarity. It is only together that can we bring an end to dependence on Russia's energy products, which have been turned into a geopolitical tool for blackmail.

The unpredictable circumstances we find ourselves in must be seen as an opportunity for a profound and rapid transformation that will free the European Union from the clutches of being dependent on both environmentally problematic energy sources and other global powers. Europe must accordingly direct the majority of its funds and efforts to the smart diversification of its energy supply and, above all, investments in renewable energy sources, with solar and wind energy being the most comprehensive long-term solutions for a sustainable energy supply. A challenging goal, but one that can be achieved while acting together.

In so doing, we must strive to ensure that this transition does not come at the expense of the most vulnerable groups. As a European community, we must act with solidarity to minimise disruptions in energy markets and ensure no one is left behind. This includes reducing demand for fossil fuels and taking voluntary measures. It is essential that we aim to ensure affordable, competitive and reliable energy markets which meet high environmental standards.

The energy crisis propelling the green transition

A green future is becoming a European policy that transcends inter-country differences and attracts a multitude of investors. Action must be taken on both the individual and systemic levels, where the solution to a secure energy future is renewable energy sources. While European Union already plans to achieve a green, climate-neutral and resilient society, even bolder steps have to be taken.

We have committed to making the EU climate-neutral by 2050. The "Fit for 55" package aims for a 40% share of renewable energy sources by 2030 and to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% in the same period. The sooner we make this

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transition, the more secure and resilient our societies will be.

The EU's plan to transform Europe's energy system, REPowerEU, is also a promising step towards achieving European energy security as it pursues three main objectives: energy savings, the increased use of clean energy, and diversification of the energy supply. The energy security of the old continent is thus inextricably linked to the EU's green transformation.

Investing in proven technologies with considerable potential for energy security will be crucial in this regard. **Electricity distribution networks will need to be upgraded** to support the increased generation of renewable energy. **Long-term energy storage systems or technologies** that provide more flexible and reliable alternative energy sources and **renewable hydrogen production** should not be overlooked. I am certain that promoting such technologies will contribute to accelerating the implementation of REPowerEU and, in particular, making energy cleaner, more affordable and more reliable.

Still, energy security is far from the only issue that requires a stronger and more resilient EU. With the war raging in Ukraine, we are becoming aware of the importance of our physical security, of our freedom. This explains why we have no choice but to also invest in our defence capabilities.

Climate change on our doorstep

In July, Slovenia experienced the largest wildfire in its history – the battle against the flames that burnt 3,600 hectares of forest lasted 17 days and involved around 13,000 professional and volunteer firefighters. This major natural disaster once again reminds us of the importance of solidarity between countries. Slovenia would have been unable to contain the fire without the air support provided by the friendly countries of Austria, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Romania. We wish to express our sincere thanks to the governments of these countries for their help in critical times.

Climate change is part of our reality and we are already witnessing scenarios that even the most sceptical climatologists believed would happen only as late as 2050. The growing climate crisis encompasses droughts, record high temperatures, storms, drinking water shortages, the battle for natural resources and rising inequalities. This string of crises has begun to take its toll on the EU's resilience and put our solidarity to the test. That is why we should go back to the beginning, recalling that the EU is a peace project based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, friendship among nations, and freedom.

The Western Balkans should also be given a European perspective

The EU has dialogue and cooperation at its core. Slovenia's close political, economic, cultural and security ties with the Union led it to also become a EU member, and we hence understand what it means to realise the European perspective. We unquestionably supported the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. This sends a strong message of support to these countries in a challenging security situation while also demonstrating the will of the Ukrainian people to move closer to European values.

A further and faster change in enlargement policy is an EU priority, and the Slovenian government is a staunch supporter of the Western Balkans' efforts to move closer to the European Union. After giving our strong support for the granting of candidate status to Ukraine, we felt morally obliged to support the granting of such status to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, thereby pulling it out of European oblivion. With respect to Bosnia and Herzegovina, we took a step forward at the June European Council, and I hope that it will be granted candidate status by the end of this year.

It is essential that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina receive a positive signal from Europe and remain hopeful. These people see the EU as their only future, and the continuation of the European enlargement policy towards the Western Balkan countries is the best guarantee for the security, stability and progress of the region. The EU needs to pursue a clear enlargement policy and find ways to accelerate democratic processes in these countries given they have not made significant progress in this area for over 20 years.

The only way to ensure a peaceful and democratic future is by building trust and fostering genuine solidarity. Although these values may have been somewhat side-lined in the last decade, I am convinced that we all want to maintain a stable and strong European Union.

United we stand, divided we fall. ◆

It is likely the war will continue for some time. The longer it lasts, the deeper it will cut into the European and global security architecture, and the greater will be its consequences for our security.

The geopolitical transformation of the world is unfolding before us. The war in Ukraine will perhaps, or even very probably, lead to a new bloc division. What is more, the formation or drawing of the border between the blocs may well become one of the factors that could prolong the war. If President Putin's objective is to rebuild and reinforce his sphere of interest, or even influence, surrounding the Russian Federation, i.e. with those countries not permitted to join the European Union or the North Atlantic alliance, then such instability will last whilst ever the Russian President finds it necessary to form such a sphere of interest. It may be noticed that the Russian Federation also considers sections of the Western Balkans as part of its sphere of interest, which poses the question of where to draw the borderline between the blocs in the Western Balkans.

The dividing line in any new bloc division in the Western Balkans is becoming a central topic regarding peace and security in Europe. The longer the process of EU enlargement lasts, the more countries in this region will be exposed to Russia's destabilising ambitions or at least its increased influence.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is undoubtedly the weakest point. The deepening of the disputes between its nations could pose a serious security risk for this country, the region and the whole of Europe. The European Union should grant Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status as soon as possible to show that it understands and is willing to deal with this issue. With its recent decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, the European Union

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Western Balkans. It is very important that the EU expand to all countries of the Western Balkans as soon as possible. Making the European Union sensitive to this issue is a main priority of the Brdo-Brijuni Process, composed of the heads of state in the region and initiated 12 years ago by the then prime ministers of Slovenia and Croatia. A mental shift must take place promptly in the EU Member States and institutions to understand enlargement as a political and strategic process rather than a bureaucratic and technical one.

It is extremely encouraging that Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania were accepted into NATO, thereby preventing the entire region from remaining a grey zone of Euro-Atlantic integration. The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO marks perhaps an even more prominent, if not tectonic geopolitical shift since the inclusion of these countries, for decades militarily neutral, will see the Alliance expand to the borders of the Russian Federation. This is ironically what the Russian Federation wanted to avoid, i.e. having additional NATO members on its doorstep – even if that meant attacking Ukraine.

showed, for the first time since the major enlargements of 2004 and 2007, that it is thinking geopolitically, which is certainly commendable. Unfortunately, the European Union is less willing and capable of a geopolitical approach when it comes to the

It is impossible to consider a new approach to regulating the European security architecture until the war in Ukraine has concluded. The course of the war and particularly the manner of its ending will significantly impact the discussions on such architecture. While aware that lasting and sustainable peace in Europe and the world is unachievable without the Russian Federation, it is hard to imagine that this can be occur without a major shift in Russian policy.

The new European security order will not only depend directly on the war in Ukraine, but it will emerge in the context of the changed global conditions. These are characterised by two processes: a shift away from globalisation, and the rise of China. Globalisation had reached a peak prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandem-

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ic, which affected international economic links and forced countries to seek ways of becoming more self-sufficient in the provision of strategic goods. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated some of these issues and added to the need for strategic (energy, food etc.) self-sufficiency. All of the above is reinforced by the effects of climate change which have been unable or unwilling to address in a timely manner.

This sliding towards a new bloc division is bringing us back to the period before the Helsinki Final Act on Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975 and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990. We are at another turning point in history.

Irrespective of these fragmentation trends, the big challenges all still require close cooperation on a global level, raising the question of China and its position with respect to both its stance on Russia's aggression against Ukraine and other current international affairs. As confirmed by response of the Chinese authorities to the recent visit by the US Speaker of the House of Representatives to Taiwan, China is sensitive to any activity it perceives as encroaching on its territorial integrity. In its own way, China is also expanding and strengthening its sphere of influence in its immediate vicinity and in other parts of the world.

The bloc division that prevailed in the world for four decades following the end of the Second World War prevented the outbreak of a new global war. Still, with the constant arms race and generation of new tensions, it was only able to ensure a fragile, apparent peace that was neither sustainable nor long-lasting. Peace is not simply the absence of war but a time that should be used to build and strengthen cooperation and alliances. Accordingly, a new bloc division is no solution. It can only provide a (necessary but not really welcome) pause in the new European and broader international security architecture. In the first step, greater efforts should be directed towards the more effective functioning of the existing international organisations like the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations. A return to the UN's fundamental principles, i.e. to live tolerantly and peacefully amid coexistence and good neighbourly relations and to cooperate on maintaining peace and security is and remains our shared commitment and task. ◆

Russian war and the awakening of Europe

It took a war for the EU to divert from the lowest common denominator, but a protracted war may also bring us apart

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

European integration as a peace process started not as a philosophical fantasy. Cooperation as a default survival method was a response to the worst war humankind had ever experienced.

Today, the speed and magnitude of the European response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine cannot be explained solely in terms of institutional, technical, and legal readiness. It is this instinct of cooperation fostered by European integration that brings us together when a signal fire is lit up.

Russia's war tragically illustrated the consequences of wishful thinking and complacency in our policy towards Moscow. However, it also showed the EU's potential as a geopolitical power, providing the crises-struck block with a unique opportunity for self-awareness building.

This newly awaken confidence will accelerate calls for greater European autonomy. But it is autonomy from foes, not friends! These past months have proven the quintessential value of our transatlantic alliance, of the EU-NATO cooperation, as well as partnerships with non-members in our neighborhood.

To fully use its potential, the EU needs to reflect on lessons learned and adapt its policies accordingly. Processes that were dormant for years are now progressing in a span of days and weeks and, with a political will, former taboos can be overcome. A momentum we must use.

The Union or Illiberalism

Since the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union

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employed its **foreign and security policy** tools to support the defender in a surprisingly swift and effective manner. Measures adopted – including sanctions packages, aid through the European Peace Facility, and the Solidarity Lanes – were unprecedented with far-reaching consequences.

Our ability to react depended fully on the **unity among the member states**. It took a war for the EU to divert from the lowest common denominator, but a protracted war may also bring us apart – the sustainability of our consensus is all but guaranteed.

The **QMV** in foreign policy, an easy fix that sneaks into our discussions, is not without risks and should be handled with care: If unity was the greatest asset we had in this crisis, then abandoning it in favor of mere voting mathematics may weaken it, deepen divisions and undermine the overall cohesion of the Union.

To avoid this scenario, we first need to cultivate the **European strategic culture.** In theory, as the strategic environment remains dangerous and unpredictable, our threat perceptions should converge. The initiated accession process of Finland and Sweden to NATO, and of Denmark to the CSDP, support this assumption. However, in practice, the **degradation of democratic principles** at home, coupled with increased cooperation with – or rather dependency on – **malicious actors**, threatens to undermine our strategic cohesion.

When building resilience, a strict insistence on the **rule of law** in all member states and candidate countries is a conditio sine qua non. Putting our house in order must precede opting for the nuclear option in the EU's foreign and security policy, for not even the QMV would help if the fire of illiberalism and national egoism spreads in Europe.

No status-quo in the neighborhood

The Russian war revitalized integration processes to the EU and NATO, helped to partially consolidate the varied membership of both organizations, diminished the credibility of the concept of neutrality, and tested the alignment of partners in the neighborhood.

This is all good news, but the grand challenge – **the completion of the integration process** – remains. The EU's global ambitions will be judged by its results in the immediate neighborhood where our competitors would encourage Europe's strategic hesitation. Russia's coming-out as a revisionist and revanchist power willing to use force to change borders might serve as a wake-up call even to the enlargement-skeptics.

To be fair, adding more countries into the Brussels policy matrix will make the internal issues of **unanimity, resilience, and sustainability of the rule of law** even more complex. The candidates will have to prove their readiness to uphold democratic principles and remain responsible partners in the foreign policy and security domain. The ability to act together – to find an acceptable compromise between one's own and the common good – must be an essential criterion for accession.

But what if not a **credible vision of membership** can guide these countries and help them compete with malign actors' subversive pressure? Would the EU be more or less of a global player if it finally managed to unite the continent? Or, conversely, what would be the strategic impact of losing these regions?

Europe whole, free and at peace is the best response to those who dismantle the international liberal order and challenge the concept of democracy at large. Europe **where borders mean less and cooperation is the default option** is the only way we can remain relevant on the global stage and deliver prosperity to our citizens. Russia's aggression against Ukraine shows us that inertia is not a solution, it does not mean the status quo. There will be no status-quo in the neighborhood: Europe will either prevail or lose.

Strong at home, strong abroad

To advance our interests globally and in the neighborhood, the European Union must **remain strong internally.** The financial, pandemic, supply, energy, climate, and price crises have created an explosive mix threatening the welfare of people in Europe and Russia will use every opportunity to add insult to injury.

Challenged by the underlying shift in the global economic center of gravity, Europe must **undergo serious reforms** if it is to remain relevant and competitive. Years and decades of neglect created investment debt in the military, research and development, and climate domains that now need to be caught up. We simply get used to enjoying dependency on others, be it in the form of a security umbrella, cheap energy, or essential products difficult to replace during a supply chain breakdown. We need to decrease our vulnerabilities in areas ranging from cyber to healthcare, from semiconductors to critical raw materials. It is also our last chance to remain at the forefront of the technological competition, to keep our technological edge.

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** also provided us with a long to-do list. One of my priorities would be the long-overdue completion of the Eurozone and making it a genuine monetary union. It was the pandemic of COVID-19 that made the EU borrow money jointly for the first time – more than a decade since I witnessed, as the then-Ambassador to the EU, how the financial crisis almost destroyed the common currency and put countries on the brink of bankruptcy.

We need to **close these existing gaps** in the European power reservoir while not opening unnecessary and potentially damaging battles over the powers of respective European institutions. In other words, we now need to reform the EU to make it stronger, more united, and competitive. Reforms will take a lot of effort, energy, and resources, let's use them wisely.

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Of all aspects of this adaptation process, **the energy and climate transition** are the most urgent. This year's droughts and wildfires in Europe are just a sample of the climate problem we have to deal with. Russia's energy war aimed at undermining our political unity spurred the reintroduction of declining fuels such as coal and wood to compensate for the gas shortage, leaving collateral damage to the climate.

However, if we are able to withhold this pressure – which I am confident we must and we will – **Russia's effort will fail** and Europe will find itself in a much better position to accelerate the transition. The short-sighted policy of energy dependency on Russia as a dependable supplier was universally discredited and it will never reinstate the lost position.

At the summit in Versailles in March this year, leaders agreed on the energy decoupling from Russia and the EU aims at speeding up three key processes:

First, in the **green transition**, the European Commission proposed that the proportion of renewables increase from the already ambitious 40 to 45 percent by the year 2030 and the energy efficiency goal increase from 9 to 13 percent within the same timeframe.

Second, to **diversify sources**, member states and energy companies have quickly engaged in negotiations with alternative suppliers from America, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Recently completed interconnectors allowed even land-locked countries like Slovakia to import LNG from global markets and substantially diversify.

Third, the EU ramps up the **development of energy infrastructure**, including the LNG terminals, networks, and storage capacities, as well as infrastructure for hydrogen and other alternative sources of energy. European funding, including through the Recovery plan will help eliminate dependencies on Russian energy carriers, support energy efficiency, and massive introduction of renewable energy sources, gradually ending the consumption of fossil fuels. For Slovakia, it is important that nuclear technology will remain part of Europe's energy mix and contribute to achieving our climate goals.

* * *

Our **unity and solidarity** with Ukraine in her righteous fight for existence is a historic test, determining the future of Europe. These virtues are essential for the EU to become a relevant global actor, repel malicious actors in its neighborhood and revive its power of attraction, and come out of the energy and climate crises as a winner.

To conclude, cooperation in the spirit of unity and solidarity enabled tectonic shifts that may lead to a geopolitical awakening of Europe – if we can keep them. ◆

A strategy for Europe to succeed in the 21st century

Technological and industrial sovereignty, together with the strong support of European citizens, are critical to addressing existential challenges

/ By André Loesekrug-Pietri, President of the Joint European Disruptive Initiative (JEDI), the European ARPA

The fragmentation of our societies calls for a profoundly new vision of public affairs. Actions capable of doing away with antagonisms so as to concentrate on our existential challenges: climate change, the explosion of inequalities, or growing tensions all around the world.

Technological and industrial sovereignty, together with the strong support of European citizens for these objectives, are critical to solving these challenges. Without naivety and if provided with political courage and bold execution capabilities, we see a real opportunity for Europe to once again become a forward-looking continent, a driving force for preserving our planet, and a place where the fruits of progress are shared fairly.

A strategy for success

The policy of small steps in the face of the climate threat is not working and dissatisfying everyone. The war in Ukraine gives an opportunity for a real energy revolution.

Like Italy, we must call on everyone to lower their consumption, concentrate our efforts on energy efficiency and insulation, and not rush headlong into nuclear power of another age, but create a much more decentralised model. We must ensure that the number of European roofs with solar energy is multiplied by 100, obstacles to getting connected are eliminated, and research efforts in storage, renewable energy without rare earths, small-scale nuclear energy or fusion are multiplied. The energy shields all over Europe, whose cost will explode, must be targeted at those who really need it.

The European Union must profoundly transform the way it operates because it is perceived as both essential in this dangerous world yet also cold, reactive and not proactive, and distant from the citizens. In contrast to the evolution of the last 20 years towards an intergovernmental model within the Council, there must be an opportunity for unparalleled democratic proximity, close work with civil society, and great agility: an end must be put to bureaucratisation, and to the permanent spreading of funds, which are a symbol of a lack of priority and therefore of real effectiveness (39,000 projects for the Horizon 2020 research pro-

We need to move from a Europe of communication to a Europe of impact.

gramme). The silos between Directorates General as well as between industry and competition are intolerable, the excessive bureaucratisation of their financial engagement, the total lack of visibility of any real impact of the considerable funds deployed, such as NextGen Europe, or a convention for the future of Europe that is out of touch with the ground, with just 60,000 participants out of a population of 450 million Europeans – all of this must be reformed from top to bottom or Europe will be drained of its breath. We need to move from a Europe of communication to a Europe of impact – a case in point being the total failure of our digital strategies thus far, as shown by the mere €3.4 billion in fines effectively paid by big tech companies in 20 years, compared to the €23.5 billion in fines imposed and the hundreds of billions in profits these companies have made. And the absence of any European company in the top 20 technology companies in the world.

Science and innovation must make up the heart of our project, not necessarily by allocating more billions to them, but by strengthening our capacity for foresight and experimentation in all directions so as to both prepare for and, primarily, influence the world of tomorrow, and create the future we choose. We need to free up energy by getting rid of calls for proposals, which are bureaucratic monsters that

encourage bounty hunters rather than enticing the best to apply, we must open up the process to operators other than State administrations, and establish simple and clear objectives to measure the impact of essential programmes like Horizon Europe, REPowerEU or NextGenEU.

We need to bring the word "recovery" into the 21st century: talking about "sectors" like the automotive, aeronautics, distribution, digital and health sectors does not take account of the fact that most of the biggest emerging sectors are now cross-sectoral: is Tesla a software or automotive company? Is Nvidia a microprocessor manufacturer or a future AI giant? The role of future ministers of research and technology, industry or ecology is not to stay on vertical value chains, with the risk of supporting outdated business models, but to use the opportunity presented by this major crisis to create wealth and jobs of the future. Provided that we truly listen to each other, European diversity must once again become an immense opportunity to better understand the complexity of the world – an emblematic example being the Baltic and Eastern European countries that saw the Russian threat coming but were largely ignored.

The evaluation of policies is today a blind spot that feeds populism: we must not establish managerial indicators but clear and regularly evaluated societal objectives, allowing these policies to be stopped or modified if they do not fulfil their mission.

Science and innovation must make up the heart of our project.

In this sense, the DARPA methodology is extremely effective because it mobilises the best people, focuses on the societal objectives to be accomplished, and leaves total freedom concerning how to achieve them. What we need is a strategic and trusted public hand.

The definition of these objectives must be an occasion for a democratic revolution. Parliament and civil society must once again become central. Citizen consultations must be multiplied since they give an opportunity for debate, for the involvement of European and collective intelligence. And why not think about a reform that places the EU at the forefront of democratic innovation – digital and offline tools already exist, we just lack the imagination and the political will to fully harness them.

As the crucible of this democratic revolution, education must lie at the core of our 7-year plans. With a knowledge-based civilisation that will make it the central tool for our future competitiveness, and an ever more unequal world, we have an opportunity to make our society one of the best trained in ethics, critical thinking and the scientific method. Bridges between the public and private sectors must be multiplied in order to ensure diversity and experience, and professional and continuing education must be made standard.

More generally, we need to safeguard and concentrate certain budgets – education, research, defence – in order to take the long view and invent a democratic method that is not inferior to the advantage of 'carnivorous' states and organisations – authoritarian states or large technological platforms. This needs to be done for either justice, whose slowness is a source of frustration in many EU countries, or the implementation of European regulations. The method to be invented must address anticipation, long-term projection, and agility so as not to always be in a strategic surprise.

The State can and must be exemplary in its core missions, to better let energies express themselves and take care of those that acceleration leaves by the side of the road. Our humanism is a powerful inspiration, which must be given its full strength.

For all of this, we need strategic, transversal, geopolitical governments and a Commission able to give impetus to long-term choices without falling into the temptation of interventionism or grand announcements without any impact. A Churchillian or Gaullist vision projected into the 21st century, embedded in deep human values but capable of making Europe as bold and strategic as the EU or China. An opportunity for European leaders to go down in history. ◆

EU enlargement as a geostrategic decision

A time for bold actions

/ By Jana Juzová, Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Global Europe Programme, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

The last European Council meeting was presented as a success in terms of the enlargement agenda – the Eastern dimension received the signal it was waiting for in the form of candidate status for Ukraine and Moldova, while the conditions for Bosnia and Hercegovina to obtain that status were spelled out. The new Montenegrin government has pledged its determination to advance along the country's EU accession path by showing progress in the fundamental areas of the rule of law and good governance. There are also high hopes that during the Czech Republic's EU Presidency we will witness progress on visa liberalisation for Kosovo.

We have also seen a shift within the EU in the discussion about enlargement, which is again high on the political agenda of the Union. Never in the past decade has so much attention been dedicated to the countries aspiring for EU membership as in the last few months. Russia's war against Ukraine clearly demonstrates that the EU should not be lulled into a false sense of calm by the relative stability in its neighbourhoods. The changed geopolitical reality, the importance of the EU's presence in the neighbouring regions, and the need for credible prospects of EU enlargement are all mentioned with greater frequency among both think-tanks and politicians.

Many have expected the EU's leaders to reassess their approach to the enlargement process and take decisive steps to demonstrate that the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe are regions with close ties to the Union which the EU will not let fall under the malign influence of other powers. And some important symbolic gestures were truly delivered – especially with respect to the 'Associated Trio' countries, with the EU for the first time explicitly acknowledging the prospect of their future within the Union. However, much more resolve and political courage are needed for the EU's intentions and the enlargement process to regain the credibility it once held.

First and foremost, if the EU's leaders really want to rethink EU enlargement as a geopolitical and geostrategic process then the entry stage should be opened to all countries in South-East and Eastern Europe aspiring for a European perspective, and Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo and Georgia should be given the status of candidates for EU membership. Such a decision would be associated with very low costs for the EU and would send a much-needed signal to the countries in the waiting room as well as external actors that the EU is serious

> To regain its credibility and re-establish its transformative power in its neighbourhoods the EU must ensure that the enlargement process is fair and that it can act as a role model.

about its relationship with its immediate neighbours and that it acknowledges and welcomes their decision to be anchored within Europe. This would also send a message to other actors profiting from the EU's hesitation and lack of vision concerning the future of these regions.

Simultaneously, the candidate countries need to enjoy a more advantageous relationship with the Union – we simply have to let them in. Until now, even the countries already negotiating their EU membership were only once confronted with the EU's decisions and measures which they had adopted and had to deal with the consequences. The European Union, caught in a series of crises and internal tensions, too often forgets to consider the consequences its steps will have on its neighbours and does not invite them into the discussions. The regions are, however, so interconnected with the Union that all of the EU's policies impact them significantly. We could see how unfortunate this absence of discussion was at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis in 2020 when the EU banned the export of medical equipment, including to the Western Balkans. Despite later EU efforts to make up for this mistake and provide assistance to its partners, the void had already been filled by other global actors, most notably China which managed to capitalise on the EU's hesitation and build a strong PR image, helped by some Western Balkan leaders. Similarly, implementation of the Green Deal by the EU will impact the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, not only as trading partners but also as countries working towards becoming aligned with European standards in terms of the green agenda. The more the EU is moving towards climate neutrality, including greater financial resources dedicated to the EU Member States for them to be able to comply with the goals, the harder it is for the countries without access to the dedicated funds in the waiting room to catch up. If the EU is serious about integrating the countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, it must involve them in all strategic decisions and have an open discussion with its partners about how to enable them to follow the same direction the EU is going in. This should encompass the candidate countries' early access to European funds, helping them to overcome the existing gap and not let them fall farther behind.

Last but not least, to regain its credibility and re-establish its transformative

power in its neighbourhoods the EU must ensure that the enlargement process is fair and that it can act as a role model. What we have seen in the past years is unpredictability and inconsistency on the EU's side, failing to react timely and adequately to either good progress in the reform process or to backsliding in fundamental areas. Some examples of failed positive conditionality are the still-awaited decision on visa liberalisation for Kosovo, despite the conditions having been met fully in 2018, or the EU's failure to begin accession talks with North Macedonia after the extraordinary efforts the country showed relative to its neighbours and in the reform process following the political crisis in 2016. On the other hand, the EU still lacks sufficient resolve to adequately react to the Serbian government and President Vučić being responsible for the serious deterioration of the rule of law and democratic standards in the country, which in 2019 led to Serbia no longer being ranked as a free country by the Freedom House Index. Further, amid environmental protests across the whole country at the end of last year the EU opened cluster 4 of the accession negotiations with Serbia, covering the green agenda and the environment.

A dangerous precedent was set by the 'compromise' mediated between Bulgaria and North Macedonia when Bulgaria's claims regarding the interpretation of history and unilateral denial of the existence of the Macedonian language officially became part of the accession negotiations. The present agreement does not prevent Bulgaria from blocking North Macedonia on the same basis again later down the road in the negotiations. Moreover, the de-facto inclusion of bilateral issues in the accession process is opening the door for other EU MS to utilise the same leverage of their veto power against other countries aspiring for EU membership. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the EU enlargement process is hardly credible and sustainable under the current rules, with each of the 27 EU MS having the option to block a country at every stage of the process.

In the medium to long term, the EU's leaders should thus reconsider the rules of the accession process and the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) in at least some stages of the process. An opening for this discussion was created by the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe where citizens expressed their wish for a more decisive EU through QMV decision-making in more areas. While such a step is very politically sensitive and a consensus will be difficult to reach, it is important to at least start an honest discussion among the MS. In the short and medium term, the EU should make efforts to mitigate the dangers of the newly created momentum in the enlargement agenda stemming from the Bulgarian compromise and the potential subsequent internal destabilisation of North Macedonia. A way forward might entail establishing mechanisms for objective EU monitoring of the conduct of countries involved in a bilateral dispute and defining the consequences for EU MS which would utilise their veto power to impose their demands and claims on the candidate countries. In the most severe cases, the EU could rely on the Article 7 procedure to avoid individual EU MS abusing the EU enlargement process as a tool in the pursuit of their nationalist agendas. ◆

A grand EU bargain, the four freedoms and merit

How to fix the European house and make room for new members

/ By Nikola Dimitrov, Former Foreign Minister of North Macedonia, Non-Resident IWM Fellow

> "The reality of the EU accession process today resembles a bus without wheels."
>
> *Gerald Knaus*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine along with the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments' subsequent applications for EU membership have revitalised the debate on EU enlargement. This offers an opportunity. At the same time, the credibility of enlargement as a tool for transforming the region has suffered in the Western Balkans in recent years. This creates an urgent challenge and undermines the EU's influence at a pivotal moment of Russia's brutal aggression. Fortunately, there are remedies that would restore the influence of the EU and embolden pro-EU reformers in this region, encircled by Member States and promised the membership prospect over two decades ago. In turn, success in the Western Balkans would importantly assure Ukraine and Moldova: that their candidacies are indeed serious commitments for their European future. The following concrete steps stand out.

Restore the merit-based nature of the process

EU accession is about transforming societies into prosperous democracies governed by the rule of law through democratic and economic reforms incentivised by realistic chances of membership. It is supposed to be merit-based. Yet, in recent years this has not been the case, weakening its transformative power.

Just look at the EU's own evaluation tools, the European Commission's annual reports. For many years already, the 'professional candidate country' North Macedonia has been as "moderately prepared" to join the EU as Montenegro and Serbia, which have been negotiating for 10 and 8 years, respectively. Albania has not been far behind. On rule-of-law fundamentals, the Commission finds that North Macedonia and Albania are on a par with Montenegro and ahead of Serbia. In a merit-based process, such findings would make a difference. To demand that the accession process be more political must not mean that it is arbitrary, not linked to merit and driven by individual Member State vetoes. While accession will ultimately always also remain a political decision, arbitrariness during the accession process itself destroys its credibility.

To restore the credibility of accession and its transformative nature, these thorough assessments of progress should have consequences.

The Four freedoms – a credible interim goal

At this moment, for many reasons which cannot be changed easily, the goal of all participants in this process – full membership – appears very distant, with every step in the process taking longer for reasons not linked to the candidates' performance. Croatia, the last country to have joined the EU, waited 1 year as a candidate country to start its accession negotiations. By contrast, North Macedonia has already waited for 17 years, and Albania 8 years. The Croatian

> Success in the Western Balkans would importantly assure Ukraine and Moldova: that their candidacies are indeed serious commitments for their European future.

negotiations were the longest in the history of EU accession – 68 months. Montenegro and Serbia have been negotiating for 121 and 102 months already, thus far closing just chapters and 2 and 3, respectively. It is little wonder that the European dream no longer appears like a stairway to heaven, but as a road to nowhere. This raises doubt that in the EU today there is the political will to admit six new Balkan members.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz[1] recently echoed President Emmanuel Macron's bring-our-own-house-in-order-first remarks[2] while noting that, for new members to join the EU, it must first reform itself, including by changing the principle of unanimity in its decision-making. Indeed, the EU's role as a global player has often been constrained by the vetoes of individual Member States, from foreign and security policy through to enlargement. The problem for the Western Balkans is that this is obviously controversial within the EU, and any success with such important internal reforms does not depend on the Western Balkans. What if the EU Member States are unable to agree on such changes in the coming years?

This makes it important to define a realistic and meaningful interim goal that all Western Balkan states can achieve even if the EU does not reach an internal consensus in the next few years. A goal that should

be linked to the meritocratic assessments performed by the European Commission. This goal should be one of transforming societies, inspiring citizens and making economic convergence far more likely. An obvious one would be to say that once the necessary criteria have been met any Balkan country should be able to gain access to the European Single Market and its citizens and businesses should be able to enjoy the free movement of goods, people, services and capital. And that this would be achievable by 2026 for those that try hard, and not be conditional on internal EU reforms which the Balkan candidates cannot influence.[3]

The current binary approach to enlargement frontloads the work while keeping the key benefits including access to the cohesion funds only until after accession. Introducing a gradual approach and timelier incentives that reward performers by way of granting them a seat at the table with no voting rights, increased funding and participation or the phasing-in of various sectors' EU integration will make the accession process more effective, more flexible and results-oriented.[4]

Restore the centrality of the rule of law

A combination of a credible and reachable interim goal and continued merit-based assessments of progress would also restore the EU's influence when it comes to the rule of law and fundamentals. Clearly, no country can hope to join the Single Market in a few years without a track record on the rule of law. Real, visible progress in this area is crucial and linked to both the final goal of accession and the interim goal of enjoying the four freedoms.

In this area, the Commission and the Member States must never turn a blind eye. Backsliding must be identified, named and shamed, while progress must be rewarded. Inclusion in the EU's monitoring mechanisms such as the Rule of Law report, EU justice scoreboard, the European Semester and others could help counter the perception that enlargement risks diluting democratic standards in the EU. This would give the candidate countries the opportunity to not only compete between themselves

but to compare themselves against the best performers in the EU while detecting their shortcomings and pitfalls.

Getting Europe's house in order

All of this would create space, and buy time, for an internal grand bargain to be reached among the EU Member States between those that insist on internal reforms (including more QMV) and those that want to see further enlargements. Such a reform would help to both fix the European house and make room for new members.

The EU will need to rebuild the political consensus on enlargement once possessed. At the same time, the region cannot afford to lose any more time. The European leaders of our generation have a choice to make. They can continue with business as usual, declare their support for a distant European future of the Western Balkans at summits, while overlooking that the current process is failing. Or they can face the reality, take action and preserve the EU as a force for good in a region that is in so many ways, including geographically, already inside the European house. ◆

NOTES:

1 Süddeutsche Zeitung, "Scholz will EU-Erweiterung mit Reformen erleichtern", June 2022.

2 Politico, "Macron urges reform of 'bizarre' system for EU hopefuls", October 2019.

3 For more, see European Stability Initiative, "The Balkan Turtle Race. A warning for Ukraine", July 2022.

4 For more, see Europe's Futures – Ideas for Action (Institute for Human Sciences IWM and ERSTE Foundation), "What is to be done? The war, the Western Balkans and the EU. Six fixes for the Western Balkan Six", June 2022. Also, Michael Emerson et al., "A template for Staged Accession to the EU", Centre for European Policy Studies and European Policy Centre Belgrade, October 2021.

The staged accession proposal

Breaking the spell of the sleeping EU enlargement

/ By Milena Lazarević, Programme Director, European Policy Centre – CEP, Belgrade
Miloš Pavković, Junior Researcher, European Policy Centre – CEP, Belgrade

ACCESSION TREATY	MEMBERSHIP STAGES	IV	**CONVENTIONAL MEMBERSHIP** • Full participation in all policies and institutions • Accession to Stage IV implies that EU will have worked out solutions for the limitation in Stage III		
		III	**NEW MEMBER STATE** • Further condition: mainly good [4.5] average rating within each cluster, with no individual chapter below the rating of 4 • Funding level equal to the corresponding amounts for conventional membership • Full participation in the policies of the EU	• EU citizenship rights • Maximum participation in the institutions, subject to limitations: no veto right in the Council, no Commissioner in the College of Commissioners, no Judge in the Court of Justice • Possibility to accede to the Schengen area and eurozone on standard conditions	
ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT	ACCESSION STAGES	II	**INTERMEDIATE ACCESSION** • Further condition: a minimum average rating of 4 within each cluster with no individual chapter below moderate rating of 3	• Funding level corresponding to 75% of the conventional membership amount • More substantial participation in the policies and institutions (e.g., speaking rights in the Council and Parliament but no voting rights)	
		I	**INITIAL ACCESSION** • Functioning Association Agreement • Application for membership accepted (Article 49 TEU)	• Minimum moderate [3] average rating within each cluster, with no individual chapter below the rating of 2 • Funding level corresponding to 50% of the conventional membership amount • Policy dialogue or observer status with the institutions	

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has spurred numerous calls for the EU to reinvigorate its enlargement policy and strengthen its geopolitical position on the European continent. Since the start of the war, there have indeed been some breakthroughs. Ukraine and Moldova have joined the group of membership candidates, Georgia received European perspective, while Albania and North Macedonia have entered the accession negotiations process. Yet, North Macedonia is left with a bittersweet taste as the very next step in its two-phased process of opening the membership talks is still conditioned by Bulgaria. Despite the crisis, Bosnia and Herzegovina was not granted candidate status and Kosovar citizens still need visas to travel to most EU countries. These mixed results can hardly be construed as a reflection of the alleged "game-changing" context created by the war in Ukraine.

To truly spur the enlargement process so that it can rise to the current occasion, the Western Balkans and the Union must finally break out of the status quo that has dominated the past decade: one where small, incremental steps in the accession process are made in exchange for (sometimes even smaller) reform steps by Western Balkan governments. All the while, the actual EU membership is nowhere in sight. The 2020 revision of the enlargement methodology was an opportunity to present a model that

would break the vicious cycle. The intention was to reorganise the accession process so that it delivers tangible benefits to the region's citizens as well as political elites along the way to membership, rather than saving it all for the very distant end. Yet, the Commission's paper alone was not sufficient to break the spell, leaving the region, as well as the Union, largely asleep when the bloody war commenced on European soil.

Recognising that the revised methodology alone was insufficient to truly revive the Western Balkan enlargement, in October 2021, two think tanks jointly proposed the Model of staged accession to the EU.[1] The Model aims, on the one hand, to motivate EU-compliant reforms in the region by offering packages of benefits as rewards for progress in the pre-accession period. On the other hand, it seeks to harness political will among even the most enlargement-sceptic member states to accept new countries into the club. To further contribute to the EU- and region-wide discussions on ways forward with the enlargement policy in the difficult and extraordinary current context, this article discusses several important ele-

ments of the Model – those that are key for securing the achievement of its intended goal of doing away with the dormant status quo.

Incentivising reforms by supporting sustainable socio-economic development and early institutional participation

The Model of staged accession proposes bundles of benefits for acceding states as a reward for improved EU membership preparedness. To make them effective and ensure they really can stimulate reforms, rewards need to be clearly outlined, predictable as well as matter in size and amounts. The Model therefore intentionally proposes packages of rewards which combine increasing funding with more substantive institutional participation, in order to create a positive impact on the society, economy and political representatives of the candidate countries.

A major incentive for EU accession for the Western Balkans is access to its internal market and the structural and investment funds, which supports socio-economic development. While access to the EU market is already provided to a large extent in the pre-accession period based on the SAAs,

the current levels of funds are insufficient to help close the existing development gap.[2] With the existing pace of economic development, Western Balkan countries will need 60 years to catch up with the rest of the EU. To address this issue, the model of staged accession proposes access to funding at the level of 50% of conventional member states – already in the first stage (Initial accession). Stage I requires at least moderate ratings for cluster averages (grade 3 on a 1 to 5 scale) from acceding state. In the second stage (Intermediate accession) the funding would reach the level of 75% of conventional membership, under the condition that each cluster reaches an average good rating (grade 4). After signing and ratifying the accession treaty by all member states, the acceding country would become a New Member State - third accession stage according to the model (mainly good ratings of 5) and be able to draw 100% of funding from structural and cohesion funds, but it would also start contributing to the EU budget.

Drawing money from the EU budget, while crucial for socio-economic development, is not the only motivation behind the accession goal. Participation in the political life of the EU is the other side of the coin. That is why the Model proposes increasing institutional participation as part of growing benefits that come with increased preparedness for membership. Already from Stage I, candidate countries would get selective observer status in the main EU institutions – the European Parliament and select configurations of the Council. As the

country proceeds to Stage II, its level of participation in the institutions advances, and obtains overall observer status, with speaking rights, too (but without voting rights). After a country becomes a New Member State in Stage III, its ministers and other representatives gain voting powers in the Council and its committees in the qualified majority voting procedures. Moreover, its citizens can vote and be elected as members of the European Parliament, just like in any other member state.

In order to ensure that reforms are carried out continuously and act as a prevention mechanism for abandoning core EU values, the Model foresees a functional approach to freezing and even reversing of certain rights and benefits. This is the principal instrument aimed at preventing any abuse of the process by the acceding countries. Reversibility between stages is also possible, though as a last resort against a backsliding candidate country. If the reversibility instrument is present and easily implementable, it will divert political leaders from non-compliance and backsliding in the reform processes.

Addressing the concerns over a dysfunctional enlarged Union

Another important facet of the Model is that it creates an opportunity for enlargement to proceed in parallel with the Union's own reforms aimed at improving its internal functioning. One frequently cited obstacle to enlarging the EU is the fear that additional members would further hamper its decision-making due to the still extensive use of unanimity voting. To address this concern, the Model proposes introduction of a "New Member State" stage in the process. In this temporary stage, New Member States' veto rights in the Council would be limited, based on specific provisions laid out in their accession treaties. Once the provisional status expires, a New Member State proceeds to the stage of conventional membership, which includes full voting rights in the Council. This time-barred limitation would allow the entry of new member states into the Union while it is undergoing its internal reforms aimed at improving the decision-making processes to fit the growing number of members.

Another problem which has created fears of further enlargements to "new" and unconsolidated democracies, such as those in the Western Balkans, concerns the weaknesses of the EU's mechanisms to keep its own members in check on the issues of

fundamental values. Article 7 procedure under the Treaty on the European Union is cumbersome and unanimous voting to sanction a member state which is in breach of the Union's values hampers its effectiveness when troublemakers create alliances. The Model recognises that Western Balkan countries would need a long time to prove themselves as functional democracies and proposes a period of post-accession monitoring and easier reversibility of membership rights in case of backsliding in these fundamental areas. According to the specific regime for New Member States in Stage III, therefore, reversal of institutional and funding benefits would be possible based on a QMV decision by conventional member states. This way, the Model in a way covers the period in which internal Union's rules for sanctioning breaches of fundamental values would be fixed and made effective.

Towards a staged accession reality

The Model of staged accession, though a novel initiative, has already created tangible impact in the policy reality. It was echoed in the speeches of the President of the European Council and in the Austrian non-paper, which have both proposed gradual integration of the Western Balkan region to the EU, picking up on several ideas from the Model. In June, the European Council gave it a breath of life when it invited the Commission, the High Representative and the Council to further advance the gradual integration with candidates and aspirants already during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner. Building upon this invitation, and in order to prevent these commitments from becoming a dead letter, the following months should deliver a roadmap for EU institutions on how to further advance the gradual integration and break the spell of sleeping enlargement.

The implementation of the Model, in all its aspects, has a strong potential to restore trust in the enlargement policy and strengthen pro-EU policies in the Western Balkans, as well as in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. While grounded in the revised enlargement methodology, it offers additional ways forward to dynamize the enlargement process and offer more for the candidate countries' citizens while their countries are still on the way to EU membership. It also seeks to encourage the sceptical member states to say "yes" to new members by addressing their legitimate concerns in a way that does not lead to permanent second-class membership.

Eventually, as the transitional provisions of the third stage expire based on the provisions of accession treaties, the New Member States become conventional members with all rights and benefits – whatever that status would mean in the EU treaty framework of the day. The "grace period" that the EU would thus be given by the new members to make itself fit for the enlarged membership could even create positive pressure on member states to speed up the internal reform. Clearly, a possible future implementation of this proposal into real policy decisions is likely to result in certain compromises and modifications. Yet, strong pre-accession incentives and reducing the concerns in the enlargement-sceptic member states need to remain part of the formula for future practical policy solutions. ◆

NOTES

1 European Policy Centre (CEP) from Belgrade and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) from Brussels.

2 Given the current levels of funding under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), the entire Western Balkan region with 18 million inhabitants receives less financial assistance from the EU (9 billion EUR) than Croatia alone, with its 4 million people (14 billion EUR).

> A major incentive for EU accession for the Western Balkans is access to its internal market and the structural and investment funds, which supports socio-economic development.

Embracing the wind of change

The EU and its Eastern Partnership neighbours

/ By Anastasia Pociumban, Research Fellow / Manager EaP Think Tank Network, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)
Milan Nič, Senior Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)

"Now listen to my heart / It says Ukraine, waiting for the wind to change" – this is how the Scorpions adapted their famous song while performing on 27 March in Las Vegas in response to Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine. The band's message was clear: this is not the time to romanticise Russia. Russia's war against Ukraine has not only changed the architecture of Europe's security order but also directly impacted the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement policy. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia's applications for EU membership, the European Council conclusions on June 23–24 this year to grant Ukraine and Moldova candidate status – and Georgia, conditional upon addressing certain key reforms – are a watershed moment for both the Eastern neighbourhood and the EU's role in this region.

The Eastern Partnership: a brief overview

Since 2009, all three countries were part of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP), which also includes Armenia, Azerbaijan and, initially, Belarus (which unilaterally suspended its participation last year following the EU's restrictive measures and non-recognition of Belarus' elections as free and fair).

The EaP policy was launched on Poland and Sweden's initiative following the impact of Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 to strengthen the EU's relations with its neighbours. As part of the wider European Neighbourhood Policy, the EaP policy aimed to create a safe neighbourhood along the EU's borders, and one could argue that by 2022 this has not been achieved.

The goal of the EaP was to bring the six countries closer to the EU in terms of trade and governance without offering a clear membership perspective, while also supporting them in the reform process and democratisation. Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have advanced their cooperation with the EU by concluding Association Agreements, including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements in 2014, which went deeper than similar deals signed with the Western Balkan countries in the previous decade, and are more precise and demanding. They ultimately formed the 'Association Trio' so as to promote themselves as the front-runners in the region in terms of closeness with the EU. They have also benefited from the visa-free regime with the EU, unlike the other EaP countries.

The fact that the 'Associated Trio' was invited to join the accession track coupled with Belarus' suspension from the EaP leaves Armenia and Azerbaijan in limbo as part of the EaP. Yet, the EU has recently started to play a bigger role in the post-war negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karabakh war, while Russia's role has lately declined. Although Russia has not been pushed away and continues to be the dominant power in the region with its 2000 'peacekeepers' in Nagorno Karabakh, the EU's emerging role led by Charles Michel offers a counterweight to Russia's presence.

Armenia has been balancing its relations between the EU and Russia. Rather than signing the Association Agreement with the EU, the country joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. It later renegotiated its relations with the EU and signed the European Union–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which entered into force in March 2021.

Previously, serious human rights violations and the prosecution of freedom of speech and independent media stood in the way of any deeper EU–Azerbaijan relationship. However, Azerbaijan's role grew this year due to its potential for supplying gas to Europe. On 18 July 2022, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Baku and signed a new Memorandum of Understanding on the Strategic Energy Partnership.

The present situation prompts the question of whether the EaP is the appropriate policy framework for the new reality in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. Most likely, it will stay in place until a new policy is developed, one that would not leave any 'grey zones' open for Moscow's further destabilisation and aggression. Such policy should reflect the growing relevance of the southern Caucasus for Europe's own security, especially with respect to the Black Sea region and security of energy supply.
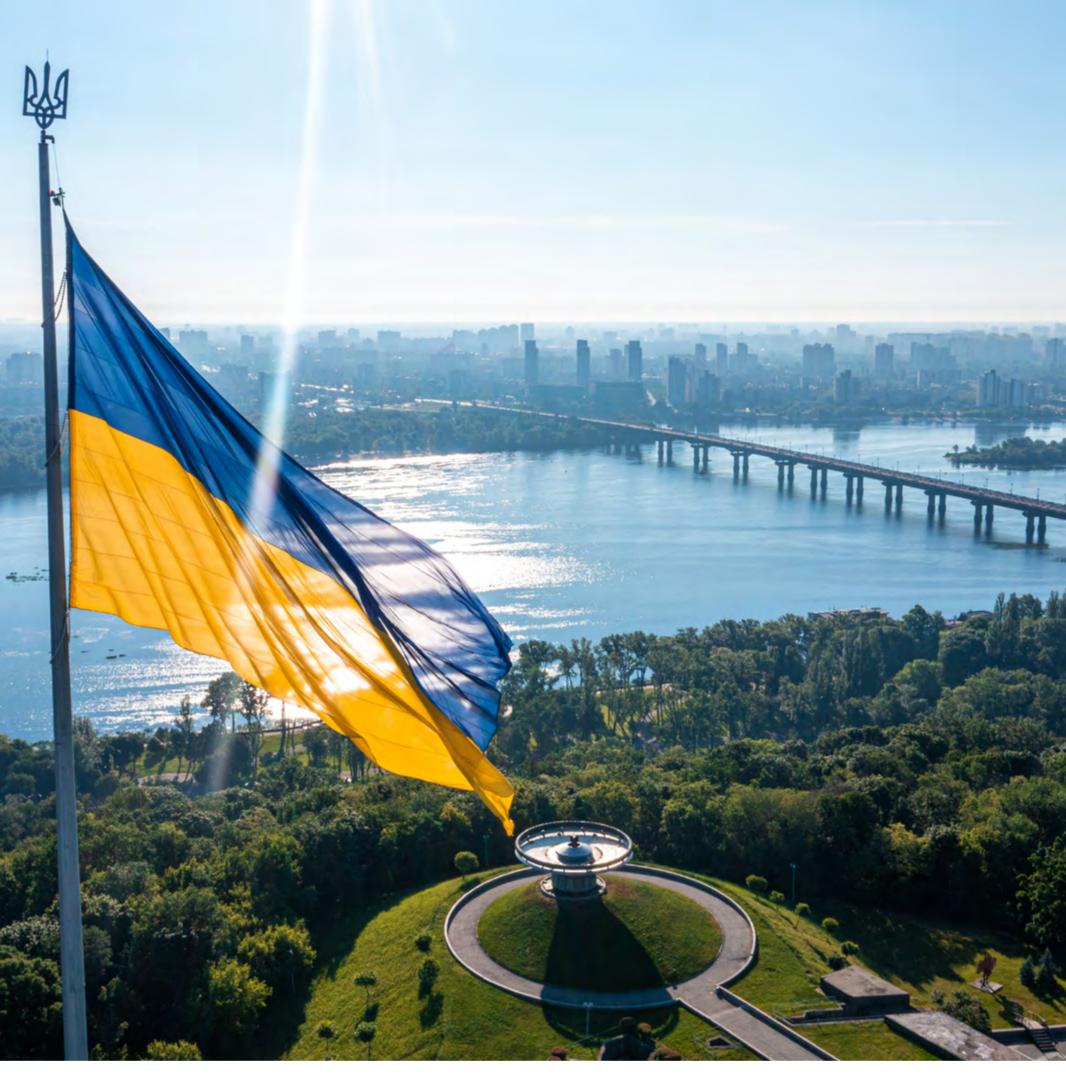
A new European (geo) political community

Looking at the current perspectives, the future of EaP policy will be linked with the Wider Europe agenda. One framework might be Macron's idea of the European Political Community (EPC), as echoed by Charles Michel. Although its members are still not defined, it could potentially include EU countries, Turkey, EaP countries, Western Balkans countries as well as the UK. The EPC idea will be further developed during the Czech Presidency and holds the potential to create a community which would also bring in countries like Turkey or Azerbaijan, whose role in the region is becoming increasingly important – albeit they are not necessarily aligned with the EU's values and norms. Still, the EPC should not be seen as a replacement for enlargement to the Western Balkans and the three EaP countries on the accession track, but as a complementary space with a focus on geopolitics and security.

Wider Black Sea region

In the future, the EU's security will be particularly exposed in the Black Sea region. This would occur not only because of its member states (Romania, Bulgaria) but also via the new membership candidates (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) as well as in its complex relationship with Turkey and its confrontation with Russia.

The Black Sea offers access to both countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal as well as the markets beyond, thus making it strategically important. While the Black Sea has seen some level of regional cooperation between countries, it was not so strategically relevant before as it is now that Russia started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's increased presence in the region and in the Black Sea – by annexing Ukraine's territories and taking control of the Azov Sea – has also crystallised the other countries' joint position regarding the common enemy. Turkey's role has become increasingly important since it acts as a broker between Russia and Ukraine and helped to facilitate the unblocking of grain exports from Ukrainian ports. Ukraine still has control of the important ports of Odesa and Mykolaiv, which accounted for 80% of grain exports in the pre-war period. Therefore, Ukraine has not only kept control of large parts of its grain production but also regained some capacity to transport it to global markets, which is vital for the global food supply chain.

In addition, it is becoming more important to address the 'Wider Black Sea' region, including the south Caucasus and the EaP-5 countries, that could provide a new framework for regional cooperation with a focus on connectivity (energy, transportation) and security. However, such an approach would leave Belarus out, hence accepting its de facto take-over by Russia. Still, if the EaP is formally kept in place for the near future, this would allow the EU Commission and other institutions to continue with their support programmes to 'free Belarus' and its civil society in exile.

The EU's security and geopolitical role

"[W]e can already say that the 2022 Ukraine war saw the belated birth of a geopolitical EU. For years, Europeans have been debating how to make the EU more security-conscious, with a unity of purpose and capabilities to pursue its political goals on the world stage. …. This is welcome, but we need to ensure that the EU's geopolitical awakening is turned into a more permanent strategic posture. For there is so much more to do, in Ukraine and elsewhere", stated Josef Borrel, the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, after the war in Ukraine started.

With the EU assuming a more distinct geopolitical role, the future of the accession process and neighbourhood policies should also evolve. The current dynamics could provide momentum to unlock the EU accession for the Western Balkans. However, this prospect relies on the strategic need to support Ukraine, Moldova (and Georgia at a later stage) as part of the same long-term accession process should they survive as sovereign nation states on the EU's own doorstep. Gradual accession would give an opportunity for countries to advance based on their own merits and gain access to certain EU programmes and membership benefits already during the process rather than upon getting the full 'membership package' only at the end (like in the current accession process).

This is a time of change – and critical challenges – also for the EU. In answer to the question whether the Eastern Partnership policy will survive, one could turn it around and state: given that it is currently maintained on life-support (through its established structures and programmes), it will either be filled with new content or superseded by a new policy platform. These two approaches combined could integrate the Associated Trio – as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan – at their differentiated levels – into the new Wider Europe agenda. This new approach would also determine whether the EU is capable of playing a more geopolitical role in its own eastern periphery after Pax Americana, or whether it will remain only a meaningless slogan (as illustrated by Josep Borrel's above quote) and a sign of oversized ambitions in a new world of rivalries between major and regional powers. ●

> **With the EU assuming a more distinct geopolitical role, the future of the accession process and neighbourhood policies should also evolve.**

Europe's future looks differentiated

How to keep it united?

/ By Prof. Dr. Sabina Lange, Senior Lecturer at the European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht, and Associate Professor at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine as the single-most important geopolitical event in Europe since the Cold War came to an end acts as a strong incentive for unity among EU member states (MS). Nevertheless, unity with respect to the appropriate actions against the aggressor is being continuously tested in view of their impact. As the invasion's consequences slowly affect an ever bigger share of political and socio-economic life in Europe and beyond, differences in the MS' preferences regarding their geostrategic role, the concrete shape of policies, and the role and powers of the EU and the MS are (re)surfacing. Simultaneously, the Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian applications for membership have reminded the EU of the incomplete enlargement in the Balkans and (re)awakened the widening vs deepening debate in a period when unity seems to be Europe's most important asset. Differentiated integration as currently championed by the proposal for a European Political Community is the most likely answer to the presently widening and deepening puzzle, provided that it manages to keep Europe united. This contribution puts forward three priorities to this end.

From widening and deepening to differentiated integration

Throughout the post Second World War history of European integration, the processes of widening and deepening have been inexorably linked. Shifts in the global constellation of power, tectonic changes in (Western) Europe's neighbourhood, (geo) politics in countries seeking to join the European Union (or its predecessors), and domestic politics in the EU's MS have at times either led to geographic expansion – widening – of the EU or supported its deepening by granting further competences to the Union and making its institutions more autonomous. When the 'Big Bang enlargement' was announced, the need to put the EU's house in order before accepting new members cemented the relations between widening and deepening. While most countries eventually joined in 2004, the EU spent almost a decade negotiating its own reforms before the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force in December 2009.

The European Council meeting on 23–24 June 2022 granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. Both candidates' accession to the EU must take "into consideration the EU's capacity to absorb new members".[1] Conscious of citizens' expectations following over a decade of 'permacrisis' and faced with a looming energy crisis and inflation, the European Council also indicated at this meeting that the MS prefer to avoid yet another round(s) of the EU's introspective reform process. The deepening aspect of the equation was dealt with near the end of the meeting's Conclusions in three modest paragraphs about a follow up to the Conference on the Future of Europe. Conscious of the rift between them concerning the pace, depth, modality of the follow up and its results, EU leaders showed a determination to preserve the unity among them.

In contrast, the European Council's Conclusions open with paragraphs on "Wider Europe" discussing the proposal for a European Political Community put forward by French President Emmanuel Macron. In essence, the proposal addresses the formalisation of the EU's political relations with its (non-EU) European partners. The European Council thereby opened the way to broaden the widening and deepening debate by de facto embracing externally differentiated integration.

Internally and externally differentiated integration

Whether all EU states must be integrated in the same way or whether differentiation in terms of participation in different initiatives is possible or even desirable is not a new discussion. 'Variable geometry', 'multispeed Europe', 'core Europe' are only a few of the notions that seek to capture possible ways of differentiation among the MS in pursuit of the need for the EU's greater competence, efficiency and legitimacy. Differences among the MS over the direction of the Union's finalité exposed by their positioning concerning the conclusion of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and recent difficulties with adopting decisions that require unanimity (notably in foreign policy and taxation), gave rise to calls (e.g. by Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi during the spring of 2022) for further integration in the direction of a federation and for a new level of internally differentiated integration.[2]

The proposal for a European Political Community, however, differs from that in two aspects: instead of promoting cooperation based on economic integration, it aims to forge "a platform for political coordination /…./ to foster political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest so as to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent"[3] with countries outside the EU. The proposal thus starts off where the hitherto European integration traditionally faces the biggest challenge to its unity: in its relations vis-à-vis the rest of the world. How can it work this time?

It is the process

The EU is not short of unwieldy processes. In stark opposition to this truism "the French pre-summit paper [on European Political Community; inserted by S.L.] mentions a light format with one or two meetings a year at the Leaders level and no permanent administrative structure".[4] While the EU's lengthy and cumbersome policy-making processes give rise to much criticism, whether for a lack of transparency, lowest-common-denominator results or inefficiency in general, they also have a side effect: ever deeper understanding of the stakes involved for all participating. In recent years, the processes leading to the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, a Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, and the Conference on the Future of Europe have provided ample opportunity for governments, EU institutions and citizens to express their views and to listen to each other. Any collaboration with non-EU European countries should bank on these methods, mechanisms, and the results of these consultations. Governments, law-makers and citizens should engage in comprehensive and continuous processes where they listen to each other and explain their particular interests. Instead of creating new structures, existing EU structures could serve as both secretariats and model formations to be 'widened' with the adequate participation of non-EU partners.

Show me the results

Even the best process must yield results. The EU has shown in the last few years, particularly when managing crises, that it can take decisions. Decisions regarding the management of the COVID-19-related health crisis, the monumental measures to overcome its economic consequences and the series of sanctions packages against Russia attest to this. The current security, energy and looming inflation crises in Europe give an opportunity for quick gains by pooling the resources and the negotiating weight and providing solidarity also to non-EU partners. At the same time, the 'normal' gains of EU integration should also be promptly shared. Agreements on access to the labour market and education, connectivity, including energy, cooperation in the areas of security, freedom and justice can all lead to tangible results with respect to safety, welfare and the feeling of a shared identity among European citizens. The more difficult technical processes of convergence on the single market rules and the political processes of meeting the standards of the rule of law and human rights protection could be adjusted to suit the situation and progress of each partner.

The Europe effect: identity and foreign policy

Anu Bradford coined the term 'Brussels effect' to describe an unintended global consequence of Brussels' regulatory power. The gist of the argument is that the size of the (EU) market makes it desirable to compete on it, thereby leading to compliance with its strict standards, which are themselves the result of its considerable regulatory capacity and internal incentives.[5] A test case of the Brussels effect is the global acceptance of the EU's privacy rules as set up by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The 'Europe effect', on the other hand, will require the strategic engagement of European countries to maintain, refine, increase and export Europe's distinct identity in global affairs based on its interest, at least as much as on its values. The current security crisis and geopolitical uncertainties, with the more intense conflict between the big powers and with Europe often seemingly counting for less than it desires, suggests that a new whole-of-Europe approach with the United Kingdom, Norway, Ukraine and the Balkans must be forged. To allow the EU to look after its interests, this approach must nourish a distinctive European identity, embracing the whole continent to draw on the strengths of all partners in defending the EU globally. With the EU at its core, but not EU-centric, the Europe effect might even make Turkey and Russia see the appeal. Some day. ◆

> **The EU has shown in the last few years, particularly when managing crises, that it can take decisions.**

NOTES

1 European Council Meeting (23 and 24 June 2022) – Conclusions, Brussels, 24 June 2022, EUCO 24/22.

2 E.g. Sophie Pornschlegel and Ilke Toygur in *After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Unity is good, but ambition is better*, published on 1 June 2022 by EPC and Connecting Europe Programme.

3 European Council Meeting (23 and 24 June 2022) – Conclusions, Brussels, 24 June 2022, EUCO 24/22.

4 Pierre Vimont in "EUCO Debrief June 2022: Enlargement, Treaty Reform, Energy and More," published on 8 July 2022 by TEPSA.

5 Anu Bradford (2020) *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World*. OUP.

Authoritarians disunited?

China, Russia and the war in Ukraine

/ By Dr. Bobo Lo, Independent international relations analyst, nonresident Fellow at the Lowy Institute, Sydney; a Senior Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), Washington DC; an Associate Research Fellow at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

It has become commonplace to assert that China and Russia constitute an authoritarian alliance or axis. They are said to be united in their opposition to the US-led 'rules-based international order', allegedly seeking to impose their own 'authoritarian model of governance' in its place. All this is occurring against the backdrop of a new bipolar era dominated by US-China confrontation. In the words of American President Joe Biden, the world has reached an "inflection point" between "those who argue that … autocracy is the best way forward … and those who understand that democracy is essential" for dealing with global challenges.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has reinforced these stereotypes. Although Beijing was surprised by the scale of the invasion, and by Russia's failure to secure a quick victory, Chinese President Xi Jinping continues to back his supposed 'best friend' Vladimir Putin in public. Beijing parrots Moscow's narrative that this is a 'special military operation,' and blames the United States and NATO for 'provoking' Russia. Lately, the Kremlin has returned the favour, supporting Beijing's aggressive response to the visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives.

Authoritarian divergence

The appearance of like-mindedness is, however, misleading. True, China and Russia are unabashedly authoritarian regimes that abhor liberal values and wish to un-

> **Far from showcasing authoritarian convergence, events have underlined that China and Russia are autonomous actors, pursuing independent foreign policies.**

dermine US global primacy. Their interests and policies also coincide in a number of areas, from opposition to missile defence and US-led alliances to support for a 'sovereign internet.' Yet there are major differences between them. China and Russia may look and talk like an authoritarian alliance, but they do not act like one. Instead, their relationship is one of strategic convenience shaped by geopolitical calculus.

Crucially, Beijing and Moscow have diverging attitudes – and approaches – to global order. China retains a strong interest in a functioning international system. Over the past three decades, it has benefited hugely from the post-Cold War order and Western-led globalisation. Through a mixture of enterprise, luck and the indulgence of the West, it has been able to exploit the system to advantage, and wishes to do so for some time yet.

China has made little secret of its desire to 'reform' the global order to maximise its influence at the expense of the USA and the wider West. However, it is a revisionist rather than a revolutionary power – a game-player not a system-destroyer. The emphasis Beijing places on expanding Chinese representation in UN bodies exemplifies its incremental approach to changing the balance of power. Meanwhile, there are many features of the current order that suit it just fine. These include: a global economy with developed supply chains; easy access to essential resources, markets and technologies; and the erosion of international rules and norms.

Russia under Vladimir Putin is a different beast. It has neither the patience, aptitude nor capacity to work the international system. Russia's economy is ten times smaller than China's, and its soft power is negligible. The Kremlin possesses few means of projecting serious influence. Which is why Putin has resorted so readily to military force over the years – in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria and Ukraine, as well as more covertly in Iraq, Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic.

Generally speaking, the more disorderly the global context, the greater the opportunities for Moscow to pursue its interests. Anarchy is a great equaliser, enabling an otherwise declining power to exert a disproportionate influence.

The limits of 'no limits' friendship

In their much-publicised summit on 4 February 2022, Xi and Putin described the Sino-Russian partnership as a "no limits" friendship. In light of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine three weeks later, many Western commentators saw this as not only confirming the strength of their bilateral ties, but also signalling Beijing's complicity in the invasion.

But the course of the conflict has revealed the limits of Sino-Russian comity. Beijing has offered vocal moral support, yet zero military assistance. A number of Chinese companies have withdrawn from Russia or suspended their operations indefinitely, fearful of Western sanctions. And the Chinese government has taken advantage of falling European demand to acquire increased volumes of Russian oil and gas at bargain-basement prices.

Far from showcasing authoritarian convergence, events have underlined that China and Russia are autonomous actors, pursuing independent foreign policies. Their strategic coordination is modest. They caucus in the UN Security Council, but the big decisions (Ukraine, Taiwan) are entirely home-made. The 'no limits' moniker testifies to the expansion of their bilateral cooperation. But it also serves as a source of leverage vis-à-vis the West. Putin, in particular, has exploited American and European fears of China to maximise his freedom of manoeuvre.

Realpolitik rules

During much of the post-Cold War era, Western policymakers acted on the assumption that the differences between Beijing and Moscow were so grave as to be essentially irreconcilable. Today, mainstream Western opinion has lurched to the other extreme: accepting the official rhetoric of like-mindedness at face value. The growing authoritarianism of both regimes has led to the facile conclusion that Beijing and Moscow think alike and that their interests are closely aligned.

Yet the Sino-Russian partnership is a cynical interaction, driven by realpolitik. Beijing has followed Moscow's line on Ukraine not because it approves of Putin's actions – quite the opposite – but because it assesses that it has little choice. To criticise the invasion, or act openly against Russian interests, would jeopardise their partnership. Moreover, there would be no compensating benefits in the form of better relations with Washington. Whatever happens in Ukraine, American policymakers across the board will continue to view China as the primary strategic threat to the United States. If Xi were to abandon Russia, he would be condemning China to long-

> **We must accept that the West has virtually no influence on the Sino-Russian partnership.**

term isolation, surrounded by an array of hostile neighbours. The challenge for him, then, is to keep Russia close, but not so close as to be too damaged by Putin's anarchic behaviour.

Russia's options are more limited still. The Kremlin is mindful of the downsides of excessive dependence on China, but the invasion of Ukraine has burned its bridges with the West. Earlier hopes that Russia might become the geopolitical pivot or balancer in a world otherwise dominated by US-China competition have collapsed. Nor is Russia capable of emerging as an alternative pole of attraction to the Global South. China has become the only game in town, and Putin has mortgaged Russia's future to relations with Beijing.

Sino-Russian cooperation has obvious limitations; their approaches to global order differ substantially; and, as the Ukraine war has shown, their interests are not the same. The longer-term outlook for the relationship is also unpromising given the widening inequality between them. Nevertheless, the partnership is here to stay; Beijing and Moscow need each other more than ever even as the shortcomings of their interaction become increasingly evident.

Lessons for the West

There are several lessons for Western policymakers from recent developments in the Sino-Russian partnership.

First, it is time to abandon the crude binarism of dividing the world into authoritarians and democracies. Some US allies and partners are themselves highly authoritarian (Saudi Arabia, Vietnam), while others are moving in an illiberal direction (India, Hungary, Turkey). More pertinently, it matters less that China and Russia are authoritarian regimes than that they behave in ways that are destabilising – most egregiously with Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Second, the West should deal with China and Russia as individual actors rather than getting distracted by the spectre of an authoritarian alliance. Conflating the sets of challenges each side poses is a sure route to policy bankruptcy. The fact that Beijing is a system-player means there is some (if diminishing) scope to cooperate with it on global issues, such as climate policy, human development, and pandemic disease. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's vision of "managed strategic competition" remains – just about – feasible. Putin's Russia, by contrast, is an international outlaw that aims to demolish any semblance of a consensual global order. While he sits in the Kremlin, functional engagement between Russia and the West is off the table.

Third, we must accept that the West has virtually no influence on the Sino-Russian partnership. It is futile to believe that steps can be taken to weaken ties between Beijing and Moscow. To go down this path is not simply naïve, but self-defeating. It only encourages Chinese and Russian hopes of leveraging their partnership to extract concessions from the West.

Ultimately, the most effective response to the diverse threats and challenges presented by China and Russia is for the West to be much better at what it does. The last two decades have revealed dysfunctional decision-making on an epic scale: the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq, mismanagement of the insurgency in Afghanistan, failed responses to the Libyan and Syrian civil wars, the global financial crisis, systematic disregard of the climate emergency, the disastrous mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sustained appeasement of Putin.

More damaging still has been the general degradation of democratic institutions and standards of governance across much of the West. This has given ample opportunity to those, at home and abroad, who seek to discredit liberal norms and values. Addressing our shortcomings is key to proving that a rules-based international order offers the best hope of addressing the great challenges before us. ◆

Tackling disinformation in an international and whole-of-society way

How the G7RRM is building societal resilience to disinformation

/ By Gallit Dobner, Director of the Centre for International Digital Policy, Global Affairs Canada, and Chair of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism

The threat of disinformation

Disinformation and other forms of information manipulation are a growing threat to democracies around the world. Of course, disinformation itself, which we define as false or misleading information that is spread deliberately, is nothing new. But the scale and speed at which bad actors can weaponise disinformation are now truly unprecedented. Foreign state-sponsored disinformation is all about advancing national and geopolitical objectives. For instance, authoritarian states have routinely manipulated information to increase polarisation in democratic societies and erode trust in elected officials and elections themselves. We have observed these dynamics in the persistent disinformation campaigns swirling around the COVID-19 pandemic and targeting various elections around the world. Most recently, we have been witness to Russia's disinformation campaigns in the context of the Kremlin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, both as a prelude to preparing the operational environment and as a continued tactic to support its military goals.

Foreign state-sponsored disinformation is an increasingly transnational, multi-dimensional and cross-platform challenge. The boundaries between domestic and foreign disinformation are blurred as is our ability to distinguish between what is freedom of expression and what is malign information manipulation. It is increasingly difficult to assign attribution with a high degree of certainty. And while we know that disinformation can have damaging real-world effects on society, accurately measuring this impact and designing proportionate responses is challenging.

For all these reasons, momentum is building to tackle the problem of foreign state-sponsored disinformation in a coordinated way, leveraging cooperation from stakeholders across society. Promoting the integrity of information is a whole-of-society endeavour in which governments, industry, media, civil society, academia and citizens themselves all have roles to play.

History of the G7 RRM

The G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) was established in 2018 at the G7 Summit in Charlevoix to address the growing global concern about foreign threats to democracy. Foreign interference in the American and French presidential elections in 2016 and 2017, specifically disinformation and information manipulation, figured prominently. These and other events catalysed the leaders of the G7 to strengthen coordination around identifying and responding to evolving foreign threats, such as hostile state activity targeting our democratic institutions and processes; our media and information environment; and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The G7 RRM is permanently coordinated by a team within Global Affairs Canada, as "RRM Canada." This team convenes and coordinates the G7 partners to develop a shared understanding of a threat and to lay the ground for coordinated responses. This year, the Prime Minister of Canada announced new funding to support the G7 RRM.

The G7 RRM includes all G7 member countries. Each member has a Focal Point, an official who participates in regular G7 RRM meetings and leverages their national institutional structures and processes to support whole-of-government cooperation and engagement. The G7 RRM includes a number of observers, including Australia, New Zealand, NATO, the Netherlands and Sweden, to heighten cooperation and avoid duplication in countering foreign threats to democracy.

Information sharing

Information sharing is a crucial part of the work of the G7 RRM, contributing to a shared understanding of evolving threats and informing national responses. Focal Points meet monthly to discuss emerging issues and thematic priorities, such as foreign agent registries, election security, COVID-19 disinformation, and engagement with social media platforms. Since addressing disinformation is inherently a whole-of-society effort, these meetings often convene experts from civil society and academia to share expertise. This engagement with civil society, media and industry is essential for successfully building societal resilience to disinformation and information manipulation and for informing effective responses for governments.

Over the course of 2022, the G7 RRM has explored how to work together to push back against the spread of Russian disinformation targeting Ukraine and currying support for the invasion. The G7 RRM recently began work along with the Carnegie Endowment's Partnership for Countering Influence Operations to lead a pilot initiative to further enhance this collaboration, gathering G7 governments, social media platforms and civil society to support the integrity of the Ukrainian information environment.

Analytical capacity

Another focus of the G7 RRM is building analytical capacity for members and observers. The line between domestic and foreign actors is ever more blurred, and bad actors are continually developing new, complex tactics. And while social media platforms often take action against malign influence and coordinated inauthentic behaviour when it is detected, they have unfortunately become intense vectors of information manipulation and interference and we cannot simply rely on platform enforcement to solve these issues. It is vital that we understand how hostile actors are using digital spaces and tools to further their goals across borders so that we can devise effective analytical methods and policy responses.

G7 RRM analysts meet regularly to share real-time insights on crises, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and collaborate on projects analysing state-sponsored disinformation and state-controlled media. We also work closely with other government entities focused on countering foreign threats to democracy, such as the US Department of State Global Engagement Centre and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Currently, a US-led G7 RRM working group is developing a framework to determine the level of affiliation between state actors and media outlets; this will in turn support analysis among the G7 partners and observers.

Response capability

The G7 RRM also works to strengthen response capacity among members and observers. For example, the EEAS is leading a G7 RRM working group focused on developing a common understanding of what constitutes a foreign threat to the information environment. This work is critical since we currently lack a coordinated international framework for countering disinformation. This is the essential starting point for coordinated responses. In addition, the G7 RRM has launched research to map national and international frameworks to counter disinformation with a view to supporting the eventual development of international norms related to foreign information manipulation and interference. This autumn, the G7 RRM is working with the EEAS to convene a series of webinars that will advance the development of international norms in this space.

The G7 RRM has also been an important platform for informing national responses. For instance, in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the G7 RRM partners have shared information with respect to responses to Russian disinformation, including capacity-building programming, sanctions, and strategic communications.

In May 2022, the G7 RRM released its first public Annual Report that focused on the threat disinformation posed to democracies in 2021. The report represents the collective view of the G7 RRM members and for the first time names the biggest foreign state actors engaged in information manipulation online, including spreading divisive disinformation: Russia, China and Iran. Publication of the report, and the naming of these actors, is an important step in raising public awareness and making society more resilient when it comes to disinformation.

The future of countering disinformation

With increasing numbers of people online, the advent of ever more sophisticated technology, and the continued evolution of tactics and trends in information manipulation, we can expect the spectre of disinformation as a threat to democracy only to grow. Attribution will get tougher. The distinction between what is domestic and what is foreign will be impossibly blurred. And in the absence of international norms, there will be no line to draw in the sand between what we as democratic societies can countenance as acceptable public diplomacy versus what we must counter as unacceptable foreign interference. Disinformation, as a threat that transcends borders and implicates whole societies, demands international responses, rooted in broad stakeholder engagement and cooperation. ◆

> In the absence of international norms, there will be no line to draw in the sand between what we as democratic societies can countenance as acceptable public diplomacy versus what we must counter as unacceptable foreign interference.

Russia's information warfare against Ukraine

An overview of target audiences and tools

/ By Roman Osadchuk, Research Associate at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

For Ukrainians, the Russo-Ukrainian war started with the annexation of Crimea, yet Russia had prepared for it in advance. Russia has demonstrated a superior attitude and neglect of Ukraine and the neighbouring countries following the Soviet Union's collapse. These efforts have been seen in products like movies, literature and blogs, most of which contain at least some form of such attitude. The approach intensified in 2013 when the Revolution of Dignity began in Ukraine. The Russian state media, trolls and Russia-aligned sources portrayed this as a "coup" and even continue to do so in 2022. Likewise, most of Russia's harmful disinformation narratives can be traced back to 2014–2015.

In response, Ukrainians have built a robust network of NGOs to counter the disinformation and improve society's media literacy. This experience has allowed Ukrainians to be less susceptible to Russian propaganda and disinformation. In 2022, the situation changed dramatically –Ukrainians have lived through air-alert sirens, fled or fought against the invasion, or heard explosion after explosion. Personal experiences have been widely disseminated and shared in Ukraine, meaning that Ukrainians were mostly disconnected from the narratives Russia has tried to amplify.

Simultaneously, pro-Russian sources have attempted to spread disinformation in Ukraine through non-traditional media. Telegram has become the major information source regarding quick updates for Ukrainians during the war. Russia has effectively invested in a network of channels that promote disinformation. The main objectives of these assets are to sow distrust in the government, amplify false claims about the West abandoning Ukraine, or intimidate the population by suggesting that Russia is winning. However, civil society and government have effectively debunked such messages. Therefore, most of Russia's information war approaches have fallen flat in Ukraine and ended up focusing on internal audiences and foreigners, who were either distant from the region or already Kremlin-sympathetic.

Audiences

While the explanation for the Russian population seemed excessive after years-long propaganda, it has been crucial while countering the cognitive dissonance that some Russians may have felt while hearing reports about the shelling of peaceful cities, hospitals and railway stations. Russian propaganda has sought to create a feeling of unity and wide-scale support for the invasion with massive social media campaigns and real-life events like concerts. Moreover, in talks with their Russian relatives Ukrainians have faced misunderstandings and propaganda cliches that their relatives have used to justify Russia's invasion. The suppression of oppositional media and manipulations with search engines and news aggregators led to closed-off media system and a unified view of world affairs, at least when publicly expressed.

A similar group that must 'defend' Russia's views and is strongly attached to the Russian media is the diaspora that lives abroad. From pro-Russia rallies and verbal conflicts between Russian diaspora representatives and Ukrainian refugees in Europe, it appears that these narratives have partly worked for this audience. Russia tailors some messages to groups that 'do not even support' Putin but blame the West for contrived Russophobia and the 'cancelling' of Russian culture, while prominent representatives of this same culture openly support the invasion.

The final audience is foreigners who either express anti-Western sentiment, support or fear Russia, or possess superficial knowledge about the region. For these audiences, pro-Kremlin actors have created a vast array of messages ranging from long-running debunked disinformation about the Ukrainian Nazi government, the supposed 'aggression of the West and NATO shown towards Russia, intimidation with nukes, or the basic discrediting of Ukraine as a capable and independent country. To reach these audiences, Russia has used the vast network of its resources like RT, Sputnik, its embassies, and a web of proxy resources abroad.

Approaches and tactics used by Russia

Russia has recycled old and introduced novel approaches to promote its position. Russian sources, from state-controlled media through to officials, have been sources of disinformation, such as with President Zelensky's 'escape' from Kyiv in the early days of the invasion. The Chairman of the State Duma, anonymous telegram channels, and media organizations have disseminated such messages.

Russia has tried to blame Ukraine for the invasion by injecting multiple false-flag theories about supposed Ukrainian offences during Russia's significant build-up or biological weapons development. The Russian Ministry of Defence has promoted these ideas through conspiracy schemes and officials' statements that seek to tie experiments on humans to the USA.

Russia has offered multiple explanations for any major event in this war, blurring the line between reality and fiction. Thus, the disinformation is adaptive and reflective of real-life events to twist or beneficially construe them. This is not the first case of such an approach as Russia attempted to do the same with the MH-17 tragedy and the Skripal poisoning. After Russia withdrew from Northern Ukraine, the world saw that Russian troops had tortured and killed civilians. Yet, Russia has engaged in multiple explanations and falsehoods, claiming that it was all staged, started to blame Ukrainian soldiers for committing those crimes and denied the mounting evidence.

The approach of multiplying 'alternative' explanations of the event helps Russians sow doubt in audiences that do not closely follow the war or Russia-sympathizers to support their point of view. These alternative versions of reality also serve as media noise so that people who do not invest time and attention will leave with the impression that the truth is contested and conflicting, thereby abstaining from blaming the guilty or drawing conclusions about it. This approach overburdens people, making them indifferent and exhausted to analyse the event, and works in favour of the perpetrators who wish to avoid responsibility for their deeds.

The next step is to use paid-for bloggers, trolls and bots to amplify and inject pro-Kremlin content. These activities range from comments in Western media publications to paid-for content on Tik-Tok or VK. Ever since the invasion started, Russia has invested in promoting pro-war hashtags on Twitter via retweet networks and batch-created accounts in South Africa, India and Latin America. Simultaneously, Russia is creating 'growing support' by allegedly paying bloggers on TikTok to read prepared text or using numerous municipal organisations' accounts on VK to simultaneously publish the exact messages.

In addition, pro-Kremlin outlets have created crude and easily debunked forgeries to undermine support for Ukraine. One of them was supposed to 'reveal' that Ukraine is selling weapons in the middle of the war. However, this narrative received so many baseless modifications that we can find similar messages every other week, with some of these messages even reaching mainstream Western media.

Concurrently, Russia has established false debunking organisations to bolster its interpretation of events. For this purpose, propagandistic initiatives like the "War on Fakes" use the fact-checkers' toolbox to deny the reality and defend Russia's actions. These initiatives establish alternative explanations and invent false claims to debunk or deny evidence based on a statement from some random Russian politician. The Russian MFA amplifies these 'investigations' to deny multiple atrocities by Russian troops in Ukraine, like the Bucha massacre. Accordingly, 'non-state' initiatives rely on Russian embassies around the world as their main amplifier.

Finally, Russia is constantly waging cyberattacks against Ukrainian infrastructure and media. Yet, Ukrainian services and cybersecurity teams have quickly mitigated or identified most of them. Russia has also injected a few poor-quality deepfakes in an attempt to give the idea that Zelensky has given up and fled or is in a critical state in hospital, both of which were debunked by Zelensky himself.

In sum, the notion that Ukraine is winning the information war is probably true in some places, but not across the world. Moreover, while the kinetic war is not over, neither is the information one that Russia initiated even before it annexed Crimea. Russia is an actor playing a long game, slowly decaying principles and values and testing the strength of systems. Thus far, it appears to have partly succeeded in instilling doubts in people's minds, but luckily not worldwide.

Russian actors are trying to blur the notion of truth and provide sceptics and conspiracy thinkers with an arsenal to 'deny' the reality with alternative explanations. Given that repetition influences trust in information, this will gradually make people more polarised and their values and priorities less consolidated. Therefore, the resistance to the influence operations is becoming crucial and consists of the ability to analyse information critically, understand how information is disseminated, and know the tactics used by disinformers like Russia. ◆

> Russia is an actor playing a long game, slowly decaying principles and values and testing the strength of systems.

How to avoid splinternet?

Modularity is a key tool for a better digital future

/ By Susan Ness, Distinguished fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and a former member of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission.
Chris Riley, Global internet policy and technology researcher and a distinguished research fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

* This article is adapted from a piece posted to Lawfare on July 19, 2022 under "Modularity for International Internet Governance."

Imagine a world where each national government determined what online information its citizens could access and send legally. Far-fetched? Not really. The internet is global, but the laws that govern it are local.

Internet users worldwide are pummeled by the same disinformation and online harms, amplified by the same global platforms and services. Responding to public outcry, a growing number of regional and national governments are drafting their own signature digital laws to attack the same global problems.

Making matters worse, authoritarian governments, among them China and Russia, have walled off access to the open internet, blocking and punishing websites that offer factual information about their political opponents, and weaponizing disinformation at home and abroad. Defending their "sovereign version of the Internet" they cynically claim they are cleansing cyberspace of disinformation and terrorism – just like western governments.

As a consequence, the Global Internet is fast becoming the "splinternet," where the globally-connected open Internet "splinters" into disjointed networks, and governments or large companies control the information users can see. The future of a free and open global internet may well hinge on democracies forging greater digital alignment to serve as a clear alternative to the internet of despotic regimes. It will not come easily.

Modularity is an intriguing approach to multinational and stakeholder engagement on digital regulation.

Western democracies understandably seek to improve platform responsibility and accountability consistent with human rights and freedom of expression. But despite increasingly similar values-based governance ideas, transatlantic collaboration on a comprehensive digital regulatory regime is not in the cards, given the disparities in the U.S. and European legal systems, norms, and priorities, along with starkly different time frames for action.

While full alignment is impossible, there is a way right now for like-minded democracies to collaborate on narrowly crafted processes, while respecting their different regulatory frameworks, legal systems, and societal norms. It's called "modularity."

Picture modularity as a five-step process using, for illustration, a module designed to vet researchers for access to platform data:

The future of a free and open global internet may well hinge on democracies forging greater digital alignment to serve as a clear alternative to the internet of despotic regimes. It will not come easily.

Modularity is a fresh form of co-regulatory governance, in which modules—discrete processes, protocols, and codes—are developed through multistakeholder procedures involving civil society, industry, academia and participating governments. The governments in turn recognize these common "modules" as satisfying the requirements under their respective regulatory regimes without the need for a new international treaty.

Examples of potential modules include systems for vetting researchers and approving their access to platform data under enforceable safety and privacy conditions; vetting procedures, minimum standards and oversight of independent auditors seeking to conduct risk assessments and algorithm impact audits; minimum disclosures and archiving rules for political advertising; and common protocols for crisis situations.

These may seem like small gains in alignment, measured against the massive geopolitical tensions pushing division. But it is a start that can deliver practical benefit in the near term, through operational alignment on important technical issues. And it helps build the muscle of collaboration and unity at this much needed time.

First, problem identification: One or more governments identify an open challenge, such as vetting researchers under a digital platform data access mandate.

Second, module formation: A group of multistakeholder experts (which may or may not include officials from multiple governments) collaborates to develop a module that sets out standards and processes for vetting researchers and their research proposals, and is designed for use across multiple jurisdictions.

Third, validation: Individual governments evaluate and approve the module by declaring that its output satisfies a specific provision, if any, of their digital platform legislation. In this example, the module output would be a determination that the researcher and her research project are cleared to receive platform data and that the project will follow strict privacy and security protocols.

Fourth, execution: The modular system applies its protocols to individual cases, in this instance, by vetting research projects that applied for clearance, and overseeing that the research project follows the required privacy and security protocols.

Fifth, enforcement and analysis: Each government enforces its national policies and procedures, including penalizing a platform that fails to provide suitable access to researchers as required under that national law. It also periodically reviews the module to ensure that it remains fit-for-purpose.

Agreements would allow the module overseers to update the module processes and rules, based on actual experience. The update would apply immediately across jurisdictions without having to wait to secure regulatory approval in each country. In that way, the modular system would be responsive to a rapidly evolving marketplace. Sunset provisions would be built in to ensure that the modules are regularly assessed for effectiveness.

The good news is that over the past few years, academics, and civil society have partnered to develop a variety of standards, protocols, and best practices that could serve as a solid foundation for such modules. In some instances, governments have been the convenor.

Modularity benefits governments, industry, civil society and users alike.

Alignment of such cross-border mechanisms will benefit all stakeholders. For governments, it can lower the cost of regulation by reducing the volume of implementation rules to be drafted. For businesses, it can reduce uncertainty and inefficiencies from having to design and run multiple operations to meet different national requirements. For civil society, it can offer a seat at the table for crafting and running the mechanisms and protocols. And for users, it reduces the confusion of navigating multiple systems that are serving the same function.

Another long-term benefit of modularity: as democratic governments become comfortable working across borders and partnering with stakeholders, they build trust and the collective muscle memory to expand collaboration beyond narrowly constructed modular operational systems, further strengthening the global internet.

Modularity is a fresh form of co-regulatory governance, in which modules—discrete processes, protocols, and codes—are developed through multistakeholder procedures.

Nations aren't waiting for alignment; they are rapidly pursuing their own solutions.

Despite concerns about internet fragmentation, for now, national and regional governments are asserting their sovereignty by enacting their own comprehensive legislation to rein in the global internet rather than pursuing shared legal frameworks. In early July, the European Union achieved political closure on the landmark Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, which the EU hopes will become the global gold standard for platform regulation, just as GDPR did for privacy and data protection. Across the Channel, the United Kingdom had been moving apace with parliamentary negotiations on the Online Safety Bill, but has paused its debate pending the Conservative Party leadership change. Australia updated its online safety laws with the Online Safety Act 2021, while Canada has circulated a white paper on a legislative framework for platform regulation.

The United States, in contrast is, well, exactly nowhere. While Congress is flooded with bills to regulate the tech industry, none commands a clear path to enactment, given the lack of consensus on what is needed and the scarcity of legislative days before midterm elections.

The EU/US Trade and Technology Partnership has provided a long-sought bridge for transatlantic tech policy discussions, although to date it has avoided delving into DSA implementation. The TTC is well-positioned to initiate experiments with modularity as a vehicle for greater EU-US alignment; whether it has the ambition to take on anything so proactive remains to be seen.

Modularity could face political pushback by governments that are reluctant to cede any amount of regulatory control.

Acceptance by multiple nations of common modules will occur only if the perceived benefits of having one system to complete a function – instead of several different systems necessitating multiple platform responses and public confusion – outweighs a government's predisposition to control the entire process.

Governments often conduct multistakeholder consultations before drafting rules. Indeed, the DSA and the OSB explicitly require such outreach. But such notice and comment procedures are not the same as multinational and stakeholder collaboration on developing and implementing the mechanisms, protocols, or codes with cross-border application.

Encouragingly, both the DSA and the current OSB draft include language that could ultimately permit some form of modularity. For example, Article 34 of the DSA requires the Commission to support international standards bodies that are developing voluntary standards for platform audits and other technical items, and, Article 35 requires it to engage civil society and industry participation in drafting voluntary codes of conduct.

The current version of the OSB similarly requires Ofcom, the UK communications regulatory commission, to consult with various stakeholders before drafting regulations and codes to implement the law. Critically, the OSB also envisions that compliance with equivalent standards may suffice, which could lead to acceptance of modular standards and codes.

The opportunity for alignment is there, but ambition and agreement are needed.

What is missing is explicit agreement by transatlantic governments to work together to allow narrowly-crafted common modules to satisfy requirements in their laws, and to add enabling legislation where it is needed.

Now is a powerful but fleeting opportunity for democracies to collaborate on the technical systems and protocols that underpin governance of the digital realm. It will slow down the splintering of the internet, speed up the ability to adapt processes and rules to a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, and support the survival of an open and safer internet that respects free expression and human rights. ◆

Opportunism empowered by disinformation

Russia's fight for influence in Africa

/ By Ewelina Kasprzyk, Programme Director, The Kosciuszko Institute
Michał Krawczyk, Disinformation Analyst & Project Coordinator, The Kosciuszko Institute
Maciej Góra, Project Coordinator, The Kosciuszko Institute

The eyes of the world are currently on Ukraine and its brave fight against Russia's aggression. Some countries, however, remain deeply divided regarding who to side with. The United Nations' vote to condemn the invasion of Ukraine came with a result revealing Africa's attitude to Russia since, out of 35 abstaining countries, 17 were African. Moscow is working hard to keep its allies close – from Mali to Eritrea to South Africa, and many people have dubbed 2022 as the "Year of Africa" in Russia's foreign policy[1].

Africa remains a zone of geopolitical competition for a few players, not just Russia. The continent's potential that lies in huge economic and demographic growth is suppressed by local conflicts, terrorism and unstable governance. Some actors see this as an opportunity for their own gains – including growing influence and dependency. And to win that competition one needs a working information strategy.

Kremlin's information campaigns in Africa use both internal crises and external events such as the war in Ukraine to manipulate local communities, put pro-Russia (or anti-Western) governments in power, undermine democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Yet, Moscow does not view Africa simply as another sphere of influence – but also as a playground or training field of sorts. Countries like Nigeria and Mozambique are exposed to new tools and narratives and strategies made in the Kremlin which, if successful, are later used in other regions. Through trial and error, Russia has come up with a model of influence campaigns that allows it to project its power and prowess in Africa.

Narratives

When designed to win the hearts and minds of Africans, Russia's disinformation narratives can take many forms. They are based on sentiments associated with the continent's brutal colonial past, disillusionment with the collective West's attitude to Africa, and regional problems of instability[2]. These narratives claim that Russia has no colonial baggage in Africa, is not responsible for the suffering and political problems caused by it, and is united with Africans in the fight against imperialists and colonialists[3].

Moscow's disinformation activities in Africa are growing every year and following its economic and military expansion on the continent. In the last few years, a number of Russian information operations targeting different African countries have been identified[4]. The aim of these efforts is to create divisions in societies, introduce confusion, and present Russia in a favourable light.

Russians have also been pushing narratives supporting political players loyal to the Kremlin – like the Frelimo party in Mozambique, military groups aligned with Moscow's interests, and establishing a positive appearance of Russian mercenaries and paramilitary via propaganda movies in countries in which Russia has a presence[5]. In Sudan, 83 fake accounts, 30 websites, 6 Facebook groups and 49 Instagram profiles were identified in 2021 as part of a disinformation campaign created to establish a positive image of Russia, included anti-American sentiment as well as support for the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. When the Sudanese authorities withheld permits for Russia to build a naval base in Port Sudan, accounts began to criticise the country's top politicians[6].

> **Moscow's disinformation activities in Africa are growing every year and following its economic and military expansion on the continent.**

With the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, these narratives have evolved to reframe the conflict in the Russian Federation's favour. At the beginning of the war, videos in which Ukrainians allegedly did not allow the evacuation of migrants from Africa and the Middle East became popular, leading to the authorities in Kiev being accused of racism[7]. Subsequently, Russia has employed a global campaign of posts supporting Russia's invasion using the hashtags #IStandWithRussia and #IStandwithPutin, masqueraded as a grassroots social movement and fuelled by @DZumaSambudla, an account claiming to be connected to the daughter of former South African President Jacob Zuma. This hashtag was used in over 100,000 tweets before being closed by Twitter8.

As the war continued, Russia changed their narratives to reframe the looming hunger crisis as an outcome of the EU and America's sanctions. Many African countries depend on grain and fertilisers from Russia and Ukraine, and the prices of basic food items like bread have historically been responsible for unrest in several African countries. For example, the national broadcaster NTV Kenya shared a story entitled "Russia to Kenya: Blame US and EU for High Food, Fuel Prices"9.

Russians are also framing the conflict as another American proxy-war, drawing comparisons with Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Syria and claiming the moral high ground by asserting that criticising Russia is a Western hypocrisy[10].

Tools

Russia has introduced a disinformation model to build political influence in Africa by using different tactics and tools in order to pump false and misleading content into Africa's online information spaces. These coordinated disinformation efforts are only part of a bigger process – extending influence over African countries by establishing good relations with the key political leaders, offering military and financial assistance, and creating a good image of Russia[11].

According to the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 16 disinformation operations in Africa linked to Russia had been documented by April 2022[12]. It is also important to mention that these efforts have continued since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pushing pro-Kremlin and anti-Ukrainian narratives.

But how are Russia's narratives in Africa being spread? In 2019, Facebook removed a set of inauthentic coordinated accounts involved in disinformation activities in eight African countries. All of them were promoting Russia's interests and connected with Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch with close ties to Vladimir Putin, who has been involved in interference in US elections and who heads the Wagner Group, a private military group linked to Russian Intelligence (GRU) and active in several African countries[13]. As disclosed in leaked documents, a firm connected to Prigozhin created and operated fake Facebook pages and Instagram accounts. The content being pushed was largely supportive of the ruling government in a given country or rebel groups backed by Russia[14]. The coordination between the Wagner group's military activities and its information operations was most visible in Libya where fake accounts were spreading content supportive of Khalifa Haftar, the Russian-backed rebel commander, along with whom the Wagner group has been fighting[15].

Another element of the disinformation efforts is the creation of non-governmental and civic organisations such as the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC)[16]. AFRIC is a pseudo-election monitoring organisation that has been used as a tool for election meddling and undermining democratic processes.

Russia's disinformation efforts also involve the 'franchising strategy', which entails paying local actors to spread disinformation[17]. This strategy allows for the creation of content well suited to local societies, to avoid language mistakes and makes it harder to detect such operations. Locally recruited African operators manage botnets, sock-puppet accounts and networks, posing as real Africans and sharing well-designed pro-Kremlin content. These actors extensively use messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram, targeting specific age groups and pushing narratives using multimedia content.

Since the Russian invasion several Russian media establishments have been sanctioned and, in a move to bypass that ban, Russia's embassies and sanctioned media itself have been setting up 'dark' social channels, e.g., on Telegram, where such propaganda can still be spread[18]. These places have become a hotspot for pro-Kremlin disinformation, presenting its side of the story, mostly using satire, graphic content, and biased 'fact-checking'. Interestingly, this content is being amplified by local media with Russian co-ownership, similarChinese state media and Chinese embassies modus operandi.

In the meantime, Russia Today (RT) is rapidly expanding its activities on the continent, launching an African English language hub in South Africa and advertising for 300 new positions across Africa[19]. Its correspondents are promoted in other media, participate in popular talk shows and information programmes where they always present the Kremlin's perspective on different matters.

As described above, Russia's efforts aimed at influencing African information spaces with its propaganda rely on a complex set of tactics and tools, from political-level manipulation through the use of digital disinformation means like bots and sock-puppet accounts to financing local propaganda operators. These activities follow the Kremlin's interests, support economic investments, and assist military actions on the continent.

Social Platforms

African countries themselves are having a hard time with policing platforms, often choosing to suspend their services nationwide. Still, recent examples show that shutting down social media is not the go-to option anymore – despite upcoming elections and the harmful content and disinformation accompanying them, the Kenyan government decided against it[20]. This reveals that the issue of disinformation in Africa will not solve itself but requires joint action and support from a variety of stakeholders such as the EU – and the platforms themselves.

Social media platforms have a role to play in terms of the detection, moderation and removal of dis- and mis-information, hate speech and incitement to violence. However, companies like Twitter or Meta are not doing enough to prevent the spread of information campaigns in Africa. As exposed last year by Facebook whistle-blower Frances Haugen, the giant lacks safety controls and the willpower to combat disinformation in non-English speaking regions, and prioritises "profits over people". Since then, the company has employed factcheckers and content reviewers who speak some African languages like Amharic, Swahili and Somali in order to debunk, mark and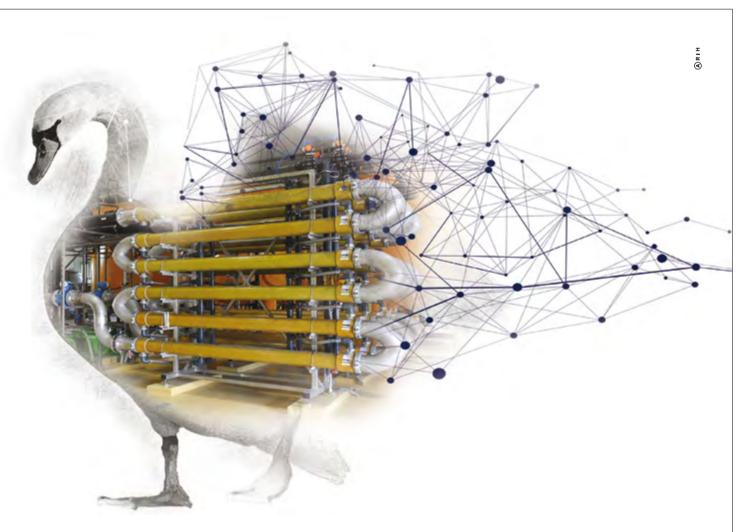 remove false information. The budget for protecting Africans from disinformation is still much smaller than what is being spent for the same purpose in Europe or North America, even though while on those two continents people are swarming out of Facebook – the platform is gaining more users in Africa[21], who are now exposed to various information campaigns, including those ones in the Kremlin.

Although African countries hold different attitudes to Russia and the war in Ukraine, and many political leaders strongly disapprove of Putin's actions, one can still find nations that depend on Russian support to overcome their own problems like poverty, unemployment, poor governance, and terrorism. Moscow's activity in Africa nourishes Putin's imperialist dreams and the West should keep an eye on how such opportunistic behaviour might affect the continent's potential, stability and freedom – and pose a risk to its own security.

The EU is well aware of this, as reflected in its new Strategic Compass. This document explicitly mentions helping African partners "to strengthen their resilience against conventional as well as hybrid threats, disinformation and cyberattacks, as well as climate change"[22] through capacity-building, proper training, and equipment. The EU underlined support and partnerships with Africa as being essential for strengthening its own security and stability[23], also bearing in mind the influence operations unleashed there by the Kremlin. While the West has been improving its capabilities in the infosphere also for its own sake, Russia is still a force to be reckoned with, as it gives the world another masterclass in persuasion and exploitation. ◆

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The truth about war

Ukraine war in context

/ By Mirko Cigler, Retired diplomat, former ambassador to the EU Political-Security Committee, first head of Slovenian mission to NATO, geopolitical analyst and commentator of the daily newspaper Dnevnik.

How frightful is mankind, and how dim-sighted!

France Prešeren, The Baptism on the Savica (translated by H.R. Cooper)

Truth and war are waging a battle of life and death. Fighting for one's truth has always been a fundamental component of any war. Without securing victory for one truth, it is impossible to win a war. Weapons and soldiers may reaffirm the truth, but they alone cannot ensure that it will be victorious. Truth is a subject of warfare, just like territory, political forces, military formations, allies and enemies, secret weapons, victories and defeats, military plans and stratagems. It is veiled in secrecy similar to any other factor that might affect the final outcome. The haze of war is inherent to any war, made even thicker by belligerents unleashing smoke bombs in their attempts to make their truth prevail. The winner determines the truth of any war – akin to the conditions set for the losing side – and the final judgement thereon is delivered by history a few generations later. The struggle for the truth about war is determined not only during the war itself, but goes on long after the war ends.

The cynicism of war is that, due to the above-mentioned haze, the politicians and generals who lead and command it fail to perceive the strategic turning point that swings the war decisively in favour of one side or the other. Blinded by power, or its illusion, they keep waging the war whose outcome can no longer be changed, hence bringing on further destruction and death.

After 6 months of the war in Ukraine, which continues to make headlines and inundate social media, are we sufficiently informed to assess with any certainty how well informed/misinformed we really are by one side or the other as they try to promote their own truth about this war? Each side's attempts at providing only their own – true – facts and limiting access to the other side's – false or hostile – information are no different today than they have been

throughout the history of warfare. The only difference is that now, in the age of information technology, this task is more complex than ever before, but at the same time much more pertinent to the final outcome. Censorship and similar limitations are controversial, even dangerous, manoeuvres at a time when being fully informed is recognised as a human right, and may produce even more disinformation instead of protecting us from it. The war in Ukraine is only 'half a war' – the war on our, bright

> *If we accept this logic, namely that the aggression, while reprehensible, is justifiable, we are putting ourselves at risk as a country and as a nation.*

side of the moon, while we remain quite ignorant about what is truly happening on its dark side. Admittedly, the Russians and their allies find themselves in a similar position. They, too, are battling for their bright side of the moon, leaving us – their adversaries and enemies – on the dark side. In a surrealist fashion, they are inviting us to Russia via social media, to their (sunny) side of the moon.

To arrive at the truth, we must focus on casus belli – the cause of war. Are the Ukrainians themselves to blame for the war? Did they oppress their fellow Russian nation citizens to such an extent that they were threatened with cultural, if not national, extinction? In the past, many things were wrong in Ukraine, and some still are – developments at odds with the standards of international behaviour that we ourselves live by. Does this justify Russia's war against Ukraine? Did Putin have any other choice but to 'save' the endangered Russians in Ukraine by destroying the country? Years ago, the United Nations developed the Responsibility to Protect concept to be applied

in cases where a population is put in extreme danger. However, any armed intervention against a sovereign country is only justified based on a collective decision of this global organisation, and is by no means left to the discretion of a particular country. Any country, against any country. Is Europe really so old and weak that it could have turned a blind eye to the threatening Nazism in Ukrainian colours in order to serve some other (American) interests? Has the European Union unanimously opened its door to such a politically unsuitable or at least controversial state? Is the Council of Europe – the institution watching over the human rights situation and the rule of law – a house of cards, a Potemkin village collapsing in on itself?

This is a similar mindset to the way rape apologists think, laying blame for the crime on the unfortunate rape victim who was apparently wearing (too) short a skirt. The reasoning goes that the macho man could not have reacted any differently given her provocative clothing. If we accept this logic, namely that the aggression, while reprehensible, is justifiable, we are putting ourselves at risk as a country and as a nation. In international relations, this means allowing the argument of force to prevail over the force of argument. Such a mindset unleashes brute force, the right of the mightier, natural rights, spheres of interest, limited sovereignty, immediate neighbourhood and similar concepts that we once hoped were a thing of the past. History teaches us that in international relations the use of force is contagious – as contagious as COVID-19. Its pandemic is called a world war and its victims are states whose immune/defence systems cannot resist force. In such a climate of acceptable force in international relations, it is not inconceivable that certain countries might once more try to 'liberate' some of their minorities. And this is not just a matter of principle, but a very pragmatic stance of a sovereign, territorially integrated state based on its vital national interests.

Slovenia is surrounded by countries that are several times bigger, more populous and have a stronger military capability. In the past, they often satisfied their territorial appetites by grabbing Slovenian land. No reason is sound enough for a war of aggression, and it is never justifiable. No reason at all. This is the postulate on which Europe and the world stand or fall. Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine will provide enough impetus for the world order to adapt itself to the new reality. Perhaps we will have to wait for an additional environmental nudge in the form of a global catastrophe. But whatever the future may bring, it will depend on our attitude to force. If we wish to live in peace, we must rein in force. We must ensure that the argument of force does not prevail over the force of argument.

War is not a football match at which we cheer for our team and yell at the referees if they do not rule in favour of our guys, and after the match, drunk on victory or saddened by defeat, return to our normal lives. War, while it lasts and even after it ends, does not allow us to return to our normal lives. It alters our lives whether we participate in it directly or indirectly, or whether we are just (accidental) bystanders. Because of the blood shed for the truth, the passion, the conviction as to who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust, who is executioner and who is victim, who is hero and who is traitor, what is the truth and what is a lie about war, mark us for all time. This explains why the truth matters; we need it as a moral compass for the future. Not only for the sake of Ukrainians and Russians, but also for our own. ◆

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Care and inclusiveness as values for diplomacy

Revising our approach to diplomacy will contribute to better global governance

/ By Rocío Cañas, Dalya Salinas, Trini Saona and Carolina Sheinfeld, Members of the Global Diplomacy Lab

The early years of the 2020s constitute a new chapter in human history. After over 2 years of an ongoing public health emergency brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, a second emergency (monkeypox) has recently been declared. In addition, coming out of the devastating global effects of almost 2 years of lockdowns across all continents, extreme environmental events linked to climate change are increasing and the world has witnessed and been affected by a war in Europe, including the risk of a protracted period of feeble growth and elevated inflation.

We live in an increasingly complex global environment, one which is simultaneously becoming both more interconnected and more fragmented. The geopolitical order of the 21st century has been gradually failing, with leadership that has caused fraction, polarisation and mistrust. COVID-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine have further challenged our international system. Growing tensions and strategic competition between the main superpowers, and the questioning of the efficacy of multilateral mechanisms have sparked competition, discouraged collaboration and hampered trust.

The unfolding events have disrupted normality as we knew it on every level. They have exponentially accelerated changes, deepened crises and added to uncertainty on both an individual scale and more generally. On the global level, they have intensified competition and highlighted systemic inequalities. As a result, the last 2 years have called into question the values that underpin our system. At the same time, we believe this context – this wake-up call –

offers a unique opportunity for transformation. As we adjust to the new reality, we have the chance to reflect on how we were functioning as individuals and societies before 2020, and to conceive new possibilities leading to more sustainable ways of relating to one another and the environment.

In this defining moment, we must reach a new consensus on how we understand the post-pandemic world and identify the biggest challenges as well as what and who

> **Two things are required in order to bring this practice to the forefront of moving to a more equitable and sustainable world: care and inclusiveness.**

should be prioritised. The voices that were already underrepresented or marginalised by our systems and were more disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are expected to suffer more from the rising global inflation and food insecurity. All over the world, these groups will face higher barriers to their emotional, physical and financial recovery.

On the international level, we have critical and urgent decisions to make collectively if we are to decisively move towards a more equitable and sustainable world, leaving no one behind – in line with the aims of the UN 2030 Agenda. Diplomacy, as a tool through which for centuries states have conducted relations, communicating with one another and negotiating in bilateral contexts and multilateral fora could play a key role in generating consensus for action.

Still, diplomacy, as traditionally understood, will not be enough. In our view, two things are required in order to bring this practice to the forefront of moving to a more equitable and sustainable world: care and inclusiveness.

Care is understood as a paradigm that includes everything we do to maintain, contain and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves (close and distant others), and the environment; people and planet. The ethics of care puts forward an approach that is relational and context-bound in decision-making. It conceives self and other as different yet connected, rather than opposed. In this context, care invites us to respond to others in ways characterised as 'feminine' because they have been at-

tributed to the responsibility of women in the private scene as part of a gender stereotype, including attentive listening, patience and understanding.

Care is relational since it defines that all selves are the result of our relationships. It is context-bound because it understands that there are individual, collective and societal values, some of which are widely shared – even up to moral conformism, while others can be group-specific or very personal, reflecting different world views and experiences. From this perspective, the ethics of care assumes that decision-makers must deal with complex moral dilemmas while addressing the competing needs of 'others' who are connected to the self.

Inclusiveness, on the other hand, relates to the acknowledgement and incorporation of the diversity of actors on the world stage. First, since diplomacy has representation at its core, it is crucial to promote the creation of a foreign policy able to represent a country's different collectives, and to train its diplomats accordingly. In addition, power relations need to be rethought, moving from power over someone else to power shared with others and power within the self. Second, in the international system, states no longer hold a monopoly on power. While states remain prominent actors, the diffusion of power has paved the way for increasingly influential non-state actors that have gained a space in discussing global governance and shared challenges. There is a need to ensure that non-state actors have the necessary space to inform policy and, where appropriate, to consider particularities of historical background, structural and social conditions, and the relationships between relevant actors.

Applied to diplomacy, adopting a framework based on the values of care and inclusiveness demands a profound revision of how we approach this practice. This points to the need to rethink, for instance, how we do diplomacy – how we communicate and relate to

one another – and how we train to become professionals in diplomacy, ascribing value to 'feminine' behaviours such as attentive listening. And, most importantly, we must devise and welcome new forms of leadership that are open to embracing uncertainty, the understanding that there is not one set of fixed universal principles, and humility to acknowledge that decisions and courses of action need constant revision and can be corrected to better suit the time and context.

Global public goods will only be truly global if they are created to benefit all in our 'world': our individual self, others and the environment.

There are initiatives working towards inclusiveness. The Global Diplomacy Lab – the GDL – is a platform for exploring a new and more inclusive diplomacy, one that goes beyond relations between countries. On its fifth anniversary in 2020, the GDL launched its strategy for the next 5 years. As a member-driven organisation, with people from diverse cultural, social and professional backgrounds, we collectively agreed that we are working towards a new form of diplomacy, one we call Diplomacy 4.0, past tracks 1, 2 and 3, with the aim of enabling all relevant actors to engage in a new form of multi-stakeholder and cross-domain cooperation with an inclusive mindset: one that seeks collaborative solutions to shared challenges in a positive-sum game.

On the other hand, considering that diplomacy is traditionally a male-dominated domain, as Gender Alliance members we are exploring the intersectionality of care and inclusiveness with the aim of raising awareness of the need for diplomats – state and non-state representatives – to use the lens of care while addressing specific challenges, taking account of the interests, needs and priorities of the diverse groups affected. To this end, within the Gender Alliance we have set up the Care and Diplomacy taskforce and aim to contribute to more effective global governance by promoting both care and inclusiveness as key values in multi-stakeholder diplomatic processes. For us, Diplomacy 4.0 involves collaborating to create the political, social, material and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living beings to thrive. ◆

About the GDL
The Global Diplomacy Lab (GDL) seeks to advance more inclusive and agile forms of diplomacy. It brings together relevant actors from a wide range of sectors and disciplines, including traditional and non-traditional diplomats. While linking global and local contexts, it establishes an intermediate space to co-create and experiment with collaborative solutions to shared challenges, based on joint learning, introspection and reflection. Therefore, all GDL activities explore, develop and (re)create context-sensitive, inclusive Diplomacy.

Peace without buildings?

European peace architectures beyond metaphor

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

The term European peace architecture is generally used figuratively as a metaphor for a web of treaties, agreements, customs, practices and actions to maintain and build peace in Europe. We rarely examine European peace architecture beyond this figurative sense. Looking at architecture for peace in Europe can enrich our understanding of the continent's political predicament. How are architectural projects expressions of the will and intentions of their builders, in this case states and their international organisations? What can we learn from the building projects realised by the League of Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union and other organisations in Geneva, Strasbourg, Brussels and elsewhere?

When the conservative powers of the Congress of Europe met in Laibach in 1821 they had little choice but to continue with the old practice of using existing buildings for their conference. The small capital city of Carniola offered makeshift meeting rooms and accommodation for the delegation at various locations around the town. Yet, one consequential intervention was made, cutting into the medieval tissue and shaping Ljubljana to this day. The Congress organisers created a new square by demolishing the old Capuchin monastery.[1] The new square was meant to provide the stage for the public display of the powers' worldly might. The attractive Kongresni Trg today continues to be a central meeting place in Ljubljana. Few visitors know that the building of the square was one of the initial steps in creating a dedicated space for international politics, albeit back in 1821 it was initially for ceremonial and military display only.

A Building for European peace

The growing conference diplomacy during the 19th century, the early steps in international organisation together with the Peace Conference at The Hague in 1899 put the question of more permanent conference buildings on the agenda. Internationalist architecture that had previously been erected at the Great Exhibition in London 1851 and later at the world expositions in Paris, Vienna, Chicago or Brussels was glorious yet mostly transitory, with the lasting Tour Eiffel and Grand Palais being rare exceptions. The fateful Berlin conferences of the imperialist powers dividing up the Balkans in 1878 and Africa in 1884 were held in German government buildings. The Universal Postal Union's founding congress was held at Berne 1874 in what is now the Empire-Saal in a restaurant called "Zum Äusseren Stand".

20th century building boom

The Peace Palace opened in The Hague in 1913 was the first monumental purpose-built architecture for international co-operation. It has remained in use ever since and today serves as the seat of the International Court of Justice. The 20th century then saw a 'building boom'. The League of Nations moved with some delay into its radiant Palais des Nations at Lac Léman in Geneva in 1937. The rise of peace architecture, metaphorically, institutionally and through buildings was happening alongside Europe's reconstruction following the Second World War. The United Nations Headquarters (1951) on the East River in New York and the UNESCO Headquarters (1958) in Paris are beacons of mid-century modernism. Replacing the simple yet swiftly in 1950/1951 erected Maison de l'Europe, the Palais de l'Europe of the Council of Europe that opened in 1976 in Strasbourg radiates a future-looking architectural response of a new inclusive and diverse European identity to the 1960s' nationalist backlash against European integration. The completion of Richard Roger's European Court of Human Rights in 1994 and the opening of the European Parliament building in 1999, both in Strasbourg, mark the peak of ambitions regarding a European architecture for peace.

Still, the most unique and creative European peace project, the European Union, has not emerged as a prime commissioner of architecture. Its controversial 'footprint' in Brussels is seen as cutting through the fabric of the city and often felt as super-imposing anonymous and utilitarian black boxes of anonymous and bureaucratic governance. While striking in their posture, the twin towers of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt that were inaugurated in 2015 are virtually undistinguishable from the rest of the city's financial architecture. NATO's new headquarters on the outskirts of Brussels are hardly visible for the general public and do not aim to inspire anyone other than the thousands of military and civilian staff working inside.

A Common European Home?

Some 200 years after the Congress held in Laibach, European powers are once again confronted with the need to establish a viable European public order. President Emmanuel Macron concluded the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 9 May 2022 in Strasbourg by proposing a European Political Community. The future of this proposal remains to be seen, not least since no new stability can be assured because it is unsure whether Ukraine will win in the war against the Russian aggressor. Against the backdrop of the 21st-century experiences, not only is a new international organisation unlikely to emerge, but it is also improbable that we will see the commissioning of any new buildings to house such a possible new European institutional architecture. While budgets might be presented as an easy-to-reach reason, structural developments help to explain such construction fatigue on the European level.

The first factor is political and circles back to President Marcon's proposition. It is an unsettled question who is building for whom and for what kind of finalité politique in and of Europe? The Soviet dictators launched the slogan "Common European Home" in the 1970s with the aim of reducing the role of the United States of America in Europe. Mikhael Gorbachev rehashed

Alois Schaffenrath, Ljubljana 1821, vir: Muzej in galerije Mesta Ljubljane

<div style="text-align:center">The idea of European peace and the efforts invested in creating a lasting European peace architecture in a figurative sense would suggest that these ideals would have found their expression in monumental buildings.</div>

this slogan in a speech given at the Council of Europe in July 1989. The Soviet conception of a closed Europe had less appeal than the idea of a "Europe whole and free" offered by President George Bush a few weeks earlier in Mainz. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), arising from the Conference for Security and Cooperation in 1996, was intended to be a bridge between these two visions during the 1990s. Eventually, the OSCE would be housed at the Imperial Hofburg Palace in Vienna; namely, not in a new Common European Home, but in the latest part of a historic palace which once served as 'headquarters' of the Habsburg Empire.

At the same time, starting in the 1990s the Council of Europe transformed from being a largely Western European organisation to a pan-European one, including Russia as a member in 1996. This was meant to create a wide range of conventional links to ensure greater European unity. Yet, such unity has remained elusive due inter alia to Russia's military aggression against Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Following the renewed aggression against Ukraine after 24 February 2022, the exclusion of the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe was seen as a necessity by the other 46 member states. The removal of the Russian flag in front of Palais de l'Europe on 16 March 2022 marked the end of this cohabitation experiment.

Beginning in 1995, the EU enlarged its membership from 12 to 28 members, with 10 more states at various stages of accession since June 2022. The federation's enlargement and growth led to a proliferation of agencies and buildings, yet barely any of them seem to aspire to be more than a response to operational and administrative needs. Brexit has shown that EU membership might also temporary and that the character of European states' cooperation is far from linear. This openness of the EU may offer some explanation of its undecided approach to architecture. Paradigmatic here is the House of European History, a European Parliament initiative that opened

<div style="text-align:center">The most unique and creative European peace project, the European Union, has not emerged as a prime commissioner of architecture.</div>

in Brussels in May 2017. This museum repurposes an Art Deco building from 1935 and displays an exhibition which naturally cannot be limited to EU members solely. All three concepts in the House of European History remain open.

Summitry

The second factor is institutional. 'Summitry', diplomacy on the highest level, has proven to be a persistent element of European politics. On the European level, Charles de Gaulle had his way weakening the young supranational European Commission when on 18 July 1961 the first informal meeting of heads of state and government of the European Community of the "Six" was held at Bad Godesberg near Bonn. It was another summit, the one held at The Hague on 1-2 December 1969, that relaunched the European integration process after the backlash of the 1960s. Since the 1970s, the roaming G7 diplomacy also shied away from giving itself permeant structures, let alone physical infrastructure. As we also have seen, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe never built any premises following its summits in Helsinki in 1975 and Paris in 1990, even when turning into the OSCE. Parallel to this, summitry became entrenched in the EU system with the European Council touring the continent. It was only with the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) that the European Council became an institution seated in Brussels. A building called EUROPA was opened in 2016 as a permanent meeting place of the European Council. Still, this new building remains a hybrid answer to the issue of a European architecture for peace. It combines the Residence Palace, a luxury housing complex from the 1920s, with a new conference facility. The new parts of EUROPA remain enigmatic to the passer-by, not communicating and shaping the urban space around it. Summits are a paradoxical element of European politics. On one hand, they confirm the existence of international society and European public order. Yet, on the other, by concentrating power and decision-making, including ad-hoc, at the highest level, they limit the growth of international institutions that act autonomously. Summiteers cherish the impression of their individual and collective leadership. Thus, it is no wonder that they rarely agree to giving an original architectural expression to the organisations and projects which they create.

"We built this house on memories"

The idea of European peace and the efforts invested in creating a lasting European peace architecture in a figurative sense would suggest that these ideals would have found their expression in monumental buildings, consummate with the noble task of continental peace. Despite the noteworthy exceptions discussed here, European politics has continued to share features with the beginning of the modern international system: roaming conferences and secretariats housed in nondescript premises and rarely in purpose-built architecture. This contrasts with the architectural ambitions of Europe's capital cities. Today's ever-expanding cyberspace, teleworking, and the ubiquitous availability of audio/video-conferencing calls for thinking about the physical and spatial aspects of European peace architecture. It remains to be seen whether the existing architecture for peace in Europe will be more than a house of memories. ◆

NOTES

1   The Headquarters of the European Commission, the "Berlaymont" stands on former ecclesiastic land. A convent of Augustinian women was demolished in 1960 to make space for the new Centre administratif européen.

What are the prospects for the Three Seas Initiative

Some considerations following the Civil Society Forum in Riga

/ By Žaneta Ozoliņa, Chairwoman of the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation
Sigita Struberga, Secretary General of the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation

Six years after the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) was launched, one can still hear comments that it is a new regional initiative that is gradually taking off and holds enormous potential for the future growth of individual Member States, the region as such, and Europe as a whole. Since 2016, each of the summits has highlighted the importance of collaboration, connectivity and investment. Indeed, who could object to the foundations of the free market, let alone the single market, given that all participating countries are members of the European Union (EU)? However, these 6 years is a long time that could have been used to advance initiatives and projects had the countries found them mutually beneficial. For instance, regional bodies like the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Nordic-Baltic cooperation mechanisms did not wait years to implement their plans but were immediately utilised for the democratisation of the Baltic States and Poland, introducing and assisting with the relevant reforms for EU and NATO accession, joint efforts to reduce pollution and improve a range of issues related to societal security and safety, and so on.

As a result, while the heads of states laud the 3SI, the business community is cautiously observing its development and will only be ready to fully engage when it recognises tangible business potential. Civil society is equally cautious and evaluating the value added of 3SI in the existing economic integration framework within the EU.

For several reasons, the 3SI summit in Riga on 21–22 June 2022 holds the potential to become historic and decisive for development of the region. First, President of Latvia H.E. Egils Levits proposed to organise the Civil Society Forum (CSF) to obtain wider support for the initiative and engage as many stakeholders as possible in the new regional cooperative network. The Forum's purpose was to provide a unique platform for the exchange of ideas and knowledge between civil society actors in the participating member states with a direct interest in long-term cooperation. The Forum brought together over 60 representatives from think tanks, the media, and professional associations.

It was the first CSF to be affiliated with the 3SI summits and it can largely be seen as a litmus test for the initiative's credibility and sustainability and the formation of the new regional identity, which is critical for the achievement of long-term goals. Civil society has a special role in a situation where the political and economic region is still in the making – it can provide a support mechanism for strengthening democracy, security and sustainability and for building links between the member states and their partners inside and outside Europe.

The future of the 3SI regional arrangement largely depends on the selection of governance models.

Moreover, the participation of civil society in the 3SI's performance manifests the founding principles of democratic societies whereby anyone can participate in the decision-making process based on transparency and accountability. Second, in 2015 the 3SI was looked upon as an integral part of the EU, in need of a boost to ensure its faster growth and the utilisation of its potential.

Since 24 February 2022, the region has become a neighbour to an active war zone and the unlimited imperialistic ambitions of Russia. This means that the 3SI has a new dimension in its already existing priority of connectivity. It is not only connectivity among participating countries, but also connectivity with those countries that seek EU membership like Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. Besides, the 3SI member states will have a special role in the rebuilding and recovery of post-war Ukraine. The region's increasing role in a wider geopolitical context has attracted countries from different geographical locations, such as the United States, Japan and others.

The future of the 3SI regional arrangement largely depends on the selection of governance models. We consider this issue to be one of the most relevant, and there are several reasons justifying this view. Today, the 3SI is based on priority projects that are run by businesses. Indeed, when the project was launched in 2015 the dominant reason for the Initiative was defined as deepening connectivity in the region and encouraging economic growth. One might say that it was about marrying private capital with regional economic growth or supporting the region's growth. Established in June 2019, the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund is a good example of this. It is viewed as a commercial and market-driven investment instrument with an exclusive investment adviser from the world of international investment management[1]. The Fund provides support based on the projects' convergence criteria and is relocated in the areas of transport, energy, and digital infrastructure[2].

Still, geopolitical cleavages in the international system require more active involvement by policymakers directly responsible for foreign and security policy. The recent 3SI summit in Riga revealed heightened interest from countries such as the United States and Japan, as well as multinational companies, which will diversify the regional agenda, intensify cooperation, and encourage the participation of countries not from the region. In these circumstances, the 3SI area is not only becoming complex, but complicated as well, and hence requires the introduction of a broadly agreed governing structure.

The involvement of civil society in the 3SI is another dimension linked to this governance issue. The greater role of civil society indicates that the region has a 'bottom-up' dynamic that is bringing more stakeholders onboard. There have been several examples of activism and participation in different regional frameworks, boosting the implementation of political decisions and mainstreaming business projects, thereby demonstrating effective cooperation mechanisms among different groups. One case is the Baltic Sea region where civil society and NGOs have become an integral part of various collaboration efforts. The Annual Forums of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region serve as a platform for networking among the main stakeholders, including NGOs and business representatives. The Forum has been criticised for the unclear outcomes of such networking activities, wherein processes substitute deliverables, which then questions the feasibility of the existing governance model. The Baltic Sea region is rich in formal and informal cooperation mechanisms, including the Council of Baltic Sea States, which oversees the layout of interactions that occur in the area, while the 3SI region does not have any joint coordination structure.

One concern expressed during the CSF in Riga was related to the governance of the processes that take place in the 3SI area. The annual summits are the highlights of the Initiative, yet it is not clear to societies what is happening between the summits, what kind of activities (except business) are underway, and who is in charge of what. The lack of management of the 3SI and its implementation is impacting the state of democracy, asking whether the basic principles of good governance are being applied and respected. The CSF partly minimises doubts about elements of democratic governance such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness.

Accordingly, the attempts to develop more effective and involved project management mechanisms have created an opportunity for civil society to find its place in common political discussions. This not only reinforces the democratic and inclusive nature of the format, but also provides an opportunity to introduce new dimensions of cooperation within the existing network. Although there is still a long way to go before the nongovernmental sector is fully included in the agenda-setting and decision-making of the 3SI, the 3SI CSF in Riga held in May this year demonstrated the initial way in which it might act as a representative body and watchdog connecting citizens with the political and business summits that reflect a broad range of regional viewpoints.

NOTES

1 Webpage of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund, available at: https://3siif.eu/the-fund.
2 Ibid.

Turkey–EU relations

Quo vadis[1]?

/ By Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, Department of International Relations Middle East Technical University and President Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara

Turkish–EU relations have in recent years seen a rapid decline in almost every field and these circumstances lead to the major question contained in the title of this contribution.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's political rule is nearing 20 years in November, making him the most experienced Turkish politician to deal with the governments of the EU Member States and institutions. These two decades have seen numerous ups and downs in the Turkey–EU relationship.

Before Erdoğan became prime minister in March 2003, Turkey had already become an official candidate to the EU in December 1999 while the Bülent Ecevit coalition government had passed the most important reform package in August 2002 amending 35 laws so as to bring Turkish legislation in harmony with EU laws, including doing away with capital punishment. At the same time, the country was also successfully implementing an IMF-supported economic stability programme.

Taking hold of the country's steering wheel in such promising conditions, during his first decade (2002–2012) Erdoğan enjoyed great support from the EU members. In 2004, he held talks with the leaders of France, the UK, Italy and Germany about Turkey's EU membership and any complications that the EU membership of the divided island of Cyprus might cause. Then German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was his chief supporter and counterpart and Turkish–EU relations flourished, leading Turkey to receive a date of December 2004 for the starting accession talks, with the talks themselves commencing with great enthusiasm on 3 October 2005. The European media, intellectuals and political parties generally seemed to exhibit considerable support for Turkey's EU path. At the time, Turkey's EU journey was enjoying widespread backing (nearly 80%) from the Turkish public.

The perspective and benefits Turkey gained from this historical development in the form of foreign direct investments and the prospect of Turkey citizens freely moving around Europe without a visa all seemed achievable. Indeed, the Customs Union with the EU since 1996 had already increased Turkey's economic compatibility while the 2008 world economic crisis did not hit Turkey particularly hard compared to other countries. Turkey's economy flourished more after the accession negotiations started and Turkey "moved to the upper leagues in world politics" in the words of Ali Babacan, then Minister of the Economy, and had joined the "club of the wealthy". Indeed, Turkey's annual economic growth grew to 8%–10% and the country had been one of the fastest-growing European economies until the Syrian civil war erupted in 2012, triggering a massive flow of refugees into Turkey.

When then Turkish President Abdullah Gül visited Germany in September 2011, he gave an interview to a German newspaper in which he stated that there are two key economies in Europe: Turkey and Germany. Such were the positive sentiments and national self-confidence of the time.

The beginning of the Arab Spring had a profound effect on Turkish–EU relations by bringing in new elements like mass irregular migration and radical terrorist groups such as ISIS, which are still affecting relations today.

Turkey's self-confidence grew as a regional power, pivoted towards the Middle East and started the 'Neo-Ottomanism' discussions. A debate followed in Europe as

Considering all the other problems and despite its transactional nature, cooperation in the area of refugees and migration is currently one of the few positive items on the agenda for Turkey and the EU.

to whether Turkey would turn its back on Europe and become a 'Middle Easternised" country.

Very recently, for instance, Turkey's decision last year to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention on action against violence toward women caused an outcry among Turkish and European stakeholders. Ironically, Turkey had become a party to this Convention during Erdoğan's leadership. Internal developments in Turkey including a foiled coup attempt in July (2016), the EU's concerns about the rule of law in Turkey, and some individual cases like the judicial process against Osman Kavala are just a few of the more recent problems in Turkey–EU relations.

The massive irregular inflow of refugees from Syria and other Middle East and African countries has turned the Mediterranean and Aegean seas into this century's 'biggest cemetery'. Turkish Interior Ministry figures show that more than 4 million Syrian refugees are under 'temporary protection' in Turkey together with millions of others from various other countries. Yet, notwithstanding the refugee deal struck between Turkey and the EU on 18 March 2016 which has been important for the EU to curb the refugee flow through Turkey, the crisis persists.

Turkey's refugee policies continue to enjoy the EU's political and financial support. The EU has committed itself to funding projects worth €6 billion to be spent on a project basis, but the need is clearly much bigger than this amount. In the context of the refugee flows, the EU attitude enforced by Greek security forces and FRONTEX has been particularly criticised for violating the principle of non-refoulment. Considering all the other problems and despite its transactional nature, cooperation in the area of refugees and migration is currently one of the few positive items on the agenda for Turkey and the EU. The Russo-Ukrainian war is responsible for another refugee crisis with more than 4 million Ukrainian people having fled the war, making the Turkey–EU refugee deal and cooperation even more important. One can certainly argue nowadays that Europe is no longer the Europe it was before the civil war in Syria and Russia's war against Ukraine.

Moreover, the Russo-Ukrainian war reaffirms Turkey's geopolitical importance and role of arbiter in resolving international disputes like in the recent Grain Corridor deal that is very relevant for the stability and security of the EU and its neighbourhood. In addition, the recent Kosovo–Serbia crisis shows that Turkey's mediation efforts and influence in the Balkans may be of use and needed from time to time.

Turkey's harsh rhetoric regarding the EU has lately softened even though the interests of Turkey and the EU still collide in many areas, including certain domestic matters in Turkey. Turkey's EU membership process has de facto come to a halt and both sides are being careful with their actions and rhetoric. Historically speaking, the Zeitgeist (spirit of time) does not seem to make it convenient to engage in any comprehensive cooperation. Mutual political trust no longer exists and will probably not be restored easily. Turkey's image has reached its lowest level vis-à-vis most European countries in decades. The paramount question now is: How to revive and revitalise Turkey's EU perspective? The upcoming elections in Turkey (otherwise set to be held no later than in June next year) could change the present deadlock and the 'mental and political hurdles with respect to Turkey. If the political reality in Turkey does not change fundamentally after the elections, the 'political trust' between Turkey and the EU will most probably continue to be missing, not "values-based strategies and long-term geopolitical interests", but the transactional pragmatic relationship will like in recent years also still be decisive. With respect to the many difficulties to be overcome in Turkish–EU relations, one may conclude by referring to former Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, who stated in an interview: "In Turkish–European relations, yesterday is yesterday and today is today, but tomorrow is another day", meaning that the lack of trust should be overcome when the circumstances change and the time is ripe. What is needed today is strategic political leadership and vision from both the EU and Turkey. This would allow us to more easily answer the question asked in the title of this contribution.

NOTES

1 Quo vadis: Where are you marching?

EYC 2022 as a year of mobilization and change

A rallying call for youth and civil society activism

/ By Dafina Peci, Executive Director of National Youth Congress of Albania, Tirana EYC 2022 | Young BSF Master of Ceremony 2021/Young BSF alumni

Designated to be the European Year of Youth, 2022 finds Tirana as the European Youth Capital (EYC), with a packed strategy and program focused on youth empowerment and activism. Featuring conferences, workshops, capacity-building programs, festivals, and cultural and artistic shows, the European Youth Capital 2022 has been shining a light on young people's role in advancing eight priority areas in society: innovation, eco-health, culture, European identity, youth spaces, capacities, diversity, and last but not the least, participation.

EYC 2022 has been a chance to rejuvenate the city life, but most importantly, it has directed central attention to understanding the degree of change provided to society by young people's participation and civil society's activism not only in Tirana, but all over Albania. A frank reflection on this is crucial to expose some lessons learned that we need to address to improve young people's participation and activism in Albania. I believe it is important to start with solid partnerships where youth are in focus, investing in youth as a strong asset, and creating more synergies among all stakeholders involved.

Partnering with Young People and Civil Society for Change

Young people are at the same time both our hope and our real key partners of change that help move Albania forward, not only to a better future but firstly to the best possible present.

They have the courage, the ideal and the desire to make the most impossible ideas real and tangible. In a broader scale, youth active participation in society strengthens not only their personal and social development but promotes a more democratic society and provides insights to decision-makers on various dynamics and developments that need to be resolved. Albania would greatly benefit from youth being engaged and empowered through meaningful participation in programs and initiatives that address their needs and priorities. With their thriving potential, young people should be encouraged to bring their voice and ideas to the table, and at the same time, be enabled to take action on them and bring the desired change.

Participation is not only an important principle of human rights but also a working practice of active citizenship for all people. Youth participation in democratic life means more than voting or running for office, even though these are important elements of participation. Participation and active citizenship mean having the right, means, space, opportunity, tools, and where necessary the financial support, to participate, to influence decision-making as well as to engage in actions and activities that contribute to building a stronger, sustainable and resilient society.

However, what often goes understated, is that the most significant aspect to meaningful participation is that decision makers respect young people to participate in decisions and recognize them as partners.

> **Participation and active citizenship mean having the right, means, space, opportunity, tools, and where necessary the financial support, to participate, to influence decision-making as well as to engage in actions and activities that contribute to building a stronger, sustainable and resilient society.**

Throughout EYC 2022's work with young people, each day, a conviction grows: that young people are not the beneficiaries of our program and activities, but they are the key partners and soul of it all.

Dedicating a year full of activities and initiatives that puts them in focus and empowers them to lead change, has been a rallying call to realizing how much of an uncontested driving force they are when given the necessary space and tools.

I hope it starts becoming a rallying call for youth and civil society's activism to take a solid shape and make use of the potential and creativity that young people can inject in our society in Albania by paving the way to social, cultural, and economic growth.

From "brain drain" to "brain gain"

Young people are our biggest asset. According to the latest Institute of Statistics in Albania (INSTAT), as of 2021, out of a population of around 2.8 million, over 900 thousand live in Tirana, out of which more than 202 thousand (29%) belong to the 15-30 age group. Young people compose the largest demographic group in the population of Albania. This makes Albania, and its capital city, a place with a young generation, translating into a larger workforce and more opportunities for investment and growth.

However, the situation is not always so favorable. Young people, in Albania but also abroad, face many challenges such as accessing high quality education and training, transitioning to the labor market, and employment. Often, in the face of youth unemployment and lack of financial stability, they find it hard to navigate a life filled with passion-chasing, turning their dreams into reality, and keeping up with the world's latest dynamics.

Brain drain is a phenomenon well known for our society in Albania, and cases when many young people choose to leave the country and seek higher standard of living abroad pursue education or employment abroad are not few, neither are they declining. In light of these developments, it is a must that governments and other stakeholders strengthen cooperation and express goodwill for addressing the challenges posed by brain drain through creating more opportunities for youth at home, enabling stability, and creating a friendly environment for those young people trained and educated abroad but choose to come back and transfer their knowledge and skills.

Creating Synergies among Civil Society as an Impetus for Stronger Cooperation

If there was one big lesson learned from the events happening during and caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that together we are stronger. Challenges we face and have to undergo do not stop at specific borders, they touch upon the lives of each and many.

The title of the European Youth Capital awarded by the European Youth Forum itself is in fact a remarkable example of encouraging cities and the youth sectors to foster better cooperation, improve the quality of life for youth and invest in long-term strategic partnerships and initiatives. In similar veins, civil society organizations in Albania have been more active to design and implement activities that fit the needs of young people nowadays. Through the implementation of the program of Tirana EYC 2022, they have sought mechanisms to expand their field of work and projects by reaching more young people.

In this regard, strengthening the networks of civil society organizations is key to creating more spaces for youth empowerment and activism, too. Joining forces, creating networks and synergies, enables civil society organizations to exchange information and learn from each other, identify best practices and obtain information about innovative approaches. Furthermore, it allows them to coordinate policies, programs, as well as to allocate more funds within their common pillars of work.

The work carried out by civil society organizations provides for the empowerment of youth, while helping increase the participation and representation of young groups in society.

Recommendations to strengthen youth and civil society activism in Albania

There is a long way to go and more effort to be done to increase the meaningful active participation, representation and leadership of young people in society. Involving young people should also mean creating and prioritizing spaces for them to access information, dialogue and knowledge-sharing with other peers, stakeholders and decision-makers.

Recommendations to successfully navigate such change are manifold, but the following would be salient to emphasize:

– Designing and implementing more youth-oriented programs that prioritize their concerns and focus on different fields of life where young people can be directly involved.

– Providing access to quality social services, inclusive and participatory education and skills development.

– Increasing youth participation and representation in formal political structures. Youth need a seat at the table at the local, state, and national levels.

Through dedicated, constructive and open dialogue with all stakeholders and partners involved, positive and sustainable change can unfold.

Beyond 2022

Tirana, and many cities all over Albania, through the endeavors of EYC 2022, and the European Year of Youth are shining a light on the importance of empowering young people to shape their life and the realities they live in. The underlining mission is to stimulate young people to shape their transformational power as agents of change.

And that should stand as a mission beyond 2022.

2022 is an historical year for Albania, leaving its mark on revitalizing and boosting young people's potential in the country, strengthening inter-institutional and cross-sectoral dialogue, and last but not least, in the context of Albania's long journey to the EU is becoming and will be a valuable asset. These endeavors take shape together with their own challenges, but at the same time, are successful in triggering positive action in the field of youth in Albania.

Hard work, combined with strong commitment and dedication, is and will remain a powerful catalyst of positive and sustainable change. ◆

The European Year of Youth and the future of Europe

About time to give young people their well-deserved seat at the table

/ By Réka Heszterényi, together.eu volunteer, participant of Young BSF 2021

In her last State of the Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared 2022 the "European Year of Youth", which gives the perfect impetus for decision-makers to provide a space for young people to become the powerhouse of European democracy.

Young BSF: A Life-changing Experience

The Bled Strategic Forum and Young BSF in which I participated last year made me realise that, as a young European, I am responsible for the future of Europe. I, therefore, joined together.eu and organised the Hungarian Youth Conference on the Future of Europe, which created space for the fruitful exchange of ideas between 60 young people and 15 experts. My experience testifies that encouraging young people to become active citizens begins by giving them a chance to make their voices heard and valued, in turn paving the way toward mutually-beneficial dialogue.

> **A cornerstone of engaging young people is making issues relatable to them by giving space to identify the problems in their local communities and propose solutions for them.**

A few insights regarding how to engage and communicate with young people

I wish to share a few insights and best practices on the topic based on my experience as a young person and a youth worker, while also relying on recent Eurobarometer studies and the knowledge I acquired at the Directorate-General of Communication's Youth Outreach Unit.

1. Listen and follow through: Transparency and accountability are building blocks when working with young people. Setting realistic goals and keeping the promises made as well as avoiding patronising and tokenism are also vital for fostering good relations and strengthening their trust in institutions. The use of co-creation and co-design can serve as best practices in this respect, for example designing local youth policies in cooperation with youth councils and student organisations. Going further, regular consultations can be carried out with young people about all types of policies since they are equally affected by employment or green policies.

Listening to young people can resolve a Catch-22 situation concerning why they tend to be disinterested in politics.

If decision-makers have the impression that youth are disengaged or apolitical, they will not focus their political messages or priorities on them. Young people will subsequently feel they are not being listened to and will not engage politically. Both parties need to make an effort to break this vicious cycle and both will benefit by learning from each other.

2. Relate to issues that concern young people: a cornerstone of engaging young people is making issues relatable to them by giving space to identify the problems in their local communities and propose solutions for them. This problem-solving mindset and attitude can later be 'scaled up' to concern the transnational level as well. Relating to local issues also helps highlight how young people are affected by EU policies on the local level and the ways they can have an impact, thereby increasing their feeling of efficacy. The range of national conferences and workshops organised in the

European Year of Youth framework listed on the European Youth Portal shows how local events can feed into European initiatives. On the other hand, problems that transcend borders hold the potential to foster pan-European engagement as illustrated by the success of the #FridaysForFuture movement.

Discussing issues that young people encounter in their everyday lives will also encourage them to speak up. According to a recent (February-March 2022) Eurobarometer study, young people's priorities for the European Year of Youth are: 1) improving mental and physical health and well-being (34%); 2) protecting the environment and fighting climate change (34%); 3) improving education and training, including the free movement of students, apprentices, pupils etc. (33%), and 4) combatting poverty and economic and social inequalities (32%).[1]

3. Rely on local volunteers and peer-to-peer mentoring: the last European election campaign mobilised thousands of volunteers to take to the streets and encourage their peers to vote. This community is still alive under the auspices of together.eu that is open to anyone ready to take the future of Europe into their hands. The success of together.eu underlines that one of the best ways to reach the more distant communities that have yet to be engaged is via local volunteers. Motivated young people not only know the priorities in their communities but speak the same language as their peers and can serve as role models. Given that young people have different capabilities, needs and goals, a range of activities should be offered. Some might only be comfortable with voting, whereas others might be ready to change the world and thus different activities with matchings levels of engagement (building a 'ladder of engagement') can make participation less formidable. Further, since in the same way, mobility lies at the core of the European

project, getting to know volunteers across countries motivates the youth and strengthens their European identity.

The Young European Federalist (JEF)'s Europe@School programme is a good example of young volunteers talking about Europe with students in an interactive way, while the European Youth Parliament is built around the idea of peer-to-peer European civic education.

4. Be genuine and avoid jargon: shifting the language away from technocratic expressions to focusing on what the EU does for its citizens and asking them about their needs, ideas and proposals are ways to start a genuine conversation. Young people, in particular, are not interested in a well-rehearsed speech and instead look for a personal touch and politicians who are not afraid to admit mistakes because that makes them more relatable. It is also equally important to build an open and tolerant space, ask open-ended questions and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect. Interactive formats, e.g. volunteers interviewing MEPs about the plenary session live on Instagram, roundtable discussions, debates or hackathons are great ways to spark discussion. The European Youth Event or the European Youth Capital currently taking place in Tirana are good examples of interactive festivals that combine knowledge sharing, entertainment and networking with decision-makers.

Communicating opportunities for engagement in a youth-friendly way brings the potential to bridge the gap between EU youth policy and young Europeans. Bullet points, slogans, colours, eye-catching fonts, pictures, infographics, short videos and links capture young people's attention. Together with the use of transparent and jargon-free language and a clear call to action, these aspects will help them better understand how they can contribute and engage. Involving them in designing communication strategies will also guarantee

that the tone and messages are adapted to the audience. Further, this type of communication can be used in other policies as well, for instance, EU policy developments can be made available in short and concise summaries making use of the abovementioned tools while including links to studies would offer a chance for further, more detailed reading.

5. Follow social media trends: a 2021 European Parliament Youth Survey showed that young people's top two information sources for political and social issues are social media and news websites (41% each). The same study also identified Facebook (54%), Instagram (48%) and YouTube (35%) as the three most commonly used social media platforms in the EU Member States for becoming informed about political and social issues, whereas TikTok only scored 14%.[2] Respondents also consider posting opinions on social media, using hashtags or changing their profile picture the second-most effective way of making their voices heard.[3] The rise of online activism is a telling sign that we should shift our perspective about what political participation means so that it encompasses unconventional, non-electoral youth participation such as grassroots activism, boycotting, buycotting as well as the digital sphere, especially in (post) pandemic times.[4] This will also challenge the assumption that young people are apolitical and will broaden the definition to focus on the public sphere instead of politics.

At the same time, less engaged young people tend to be critical of social media because of the overwhelming amount of disinformation and misinformation and do not feel informed enough to find out the truth for themselves. Distrust in media and the lack of proper information can be overcome by improving media literacy education in schools and promoting it via NGO projects. Moreover, a standardised, EU-wide citizenship class would also help

unify understanding of the EU, as proposed by the Implementation of citizenship education actions in the EU report.

Empowering young people to create a Europe fit for a new age

Why should we empower young people? The short answer is because they make up about 17% of the EU's population[5] and accordingly there can be no functioning democracy without them. We often use the cliché that young people are the future but we should not forget that to have engaged, responsible and educated future citizens we must provide them with the space, means and opportunities to make their voices heard today. If we empower young people with the attitudes, knowledge, skills and tools to shape their own communities on the national, regional and European levels, to respect European values such as solidarity, human rights and the rule of law while also developing critical and digital media literacy skills, they will indeed become the drivers of a European democracy fit for a new age. ◆

NOTES

1 Flash Eurobarometer 502 Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth, p.11 https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282

2 Flash Eurobarometer European Parliament Youth Survey, pp.41-45 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/youth-survey-2021

3 Flash Eurobarometer 502 Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth, p.31 https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282

4 Meaningful Youth Political Participation in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Policy Implications, p.55 https://rpp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/PREMS+149821+GBR+2600+Study+on+Youth+political+participation+WEB+16x24+%281%29.pdf/d2ecb223-edda-abd2-30f7-c77692a086bd

5 Understood as the population between the ages 15-29. Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_demographic_trends

Security in the middle of a cyber war

The number of security incidents keeps growing every year, with cyberattacks becoming ever more sophisticated, leaving practically nobody safe. Cyber risks are a new reality, as reflected in the never-ending efforts needed to ensure information security. A constant race without any winners appears to be underway since information security and resilience are being challenged in new ways every single day.

One out of every five companies has been the target of an attack, and every 39 seconds a cyberattack is underway. It is no longer a question of whether you will be attacked, but when. The most frequent security incidents are malware (worms, trojans etc.) and ransomware typically delivered by attackers to victims through phishing attacks or software vulnerabilities, DDoS attacks, data loss, disclosure and/or theft.

The pillar of cybersecurity

Cybercriminals are always looking for cracks, vulnerabilities, undefended and carelessly secured data; basically anything they can make money from by selling information or data or blackmailing companies, organisations, institutions and individuals. In Slovenia, such efforts are prevented by Telekom Slovenije's Cyber Security Operations Centre which boasts the most cutting-edge security operations centre (SOC) in the country, providing important added value in the area of cybersecurity. It operates 24/7 and employs experts holding specific know-how concerning the security of services and infrastructure. On top of performing tests to discover any potential vulnerabilities, these specialists actively monitor security events in ICT systems, assess their content, context and origin in real-time, and initiate appropriate activities. Various advanced technology tools are used to analyse security events from over 5,000 network devices and 5,000 termination points (i.e. computers, servers etc.), generating around 15,000 events per second for a total of about 1 billion events every day. Security incidents are closely monitored, while the information on potential threats the Centre receives from different sources is analysed and assessed. As soon as any derogations that could present a security risk are detected, the specially established cyber response group takes immediate action.

In an attack, the most important steps are fast response, stopping the attack, analysing activity, restoring operations as soon as possible and, if needed, adopting additional security measures.

Telekom Slovenije also uses the Cyber Security Operations Centre for its own corporate needs.

Multiple award-winning and internationally certified

At the main information security event held in the country, Telekom Slovenije's Cyber Security Operations Centre was awarded the most innovative security solution for the second time. Employees and processes at the Centre are certified and comply with

It is no longer a question of whether you will be attacked, but when.

the leading certificates and standards in information security, including ISO 27001.

"Telekom Slovenije's Cyber Security Operations Centre utilises highly advanced technology, supported by accomplished and certified processes and competent employees. Its processes focus on support in three key areas, namely the corporate environment with an emphasis on business-information systems, national security with stress on critical infrastructure, state institutions and providers of essential services, and the private sector, where it ensures the security of the personal data of individuals who form part of organisational systems", stated the conference organisers while commenting on the award.

The event organisers underlined the importance of the ISO 22301 standard for the business continuity system, noting that Telekom Slovenije is the first and only telecommunications operator in Slovenia to have received it. Moreover, all personally identifiable information (PII) processed or stored in Telekom Slovenije's public cloud is managed according to the ISO 27018 standard (Code of practice for protection of personally identifiable information (PII) in public clouds acting as PII processors).

Cyber protection during Slovenia's presidency of the EU Council

Telekom Slovenije has many years of ex-

perience in providing comprehensive ICT solutions for the biggest and most challenging events, including Slovenia's presidency of the EU Council in 2021. Apart from supplying the information infrastructure, the company successfully provided cybersecurity services.

5G and the Internet of Things call for a cybersecurity focus

The rapid expansion of 5G mobile networks is ushering in significant changes. Compared to the existing mobile networks, 5G brings much higher data transfer speeds and a much shorter response time with exceptionally low latency, while also supporting simultaneous efficient connectivity for an exceptional number of devices. 5G and the Internet of Things (IoT) are encouraging a vast number of always-connected devices with a broad data highway. The huge number of connected devices creates a massive number of events that each have to be reviewed and analysed. Such activities are becoming increasingly complex, which means the context and a detailed understanding of business processes are needed to support the taking of the right decisions. IoT devices allow connections to resources never before connected to the Internet, which triggers threat concerns from a cybersecurity perspective. The IoT is namely further adding to the complexity of cybersecurity.

A growing number of entities (companies, organisations and institutions) are choosing security services

More and more organisations are choosing security services, where the cybersecurity services of the Cyber Security Operations Centre are aimed at protecting businesses, organisations that operate critical infrastructure and other essential activities, and companies of all industries and sizes. One of the solution's key advantages is the ability it gives to adapt the cybersecurity and protection service to suit each customer.

In the past few years, Telekom Slovenije has relied on process automation, integration, artificial intelligence and machine learning together with state-of-the-art security solutions to expand the Centre's operations to the segments of medium, small and micro businesses. This permits the

Centre to provide cybersecurity to companies of all sizes – from the biggest enterprise systems to the smallest businesses. Another service the Cyber Security Operations Centre provides is system security audits and security audits for Microsoft solutions which, unlike one-off audits, assure auditing and monitoring over a longer time period. The Centre also consults organisations regarding business compliance and the suitability of technical measures for personal data protection, manages customers' IT infrastructure (networks, servers, firewalls, personal computers), while it also provides a system for managing secure business mobility and business applications across all user devices.

Future cybersecurity developments

Telekom Slovenije actively monitors the latest cybersecurity trends and activities. With continued investment, the company is planning to upgrade technologies for advanced threat detection, in-depth analytics, more automated operative processes, and different security and intrusion tests. The company is currently implementing new solutions to assure an active response to cybersecurity incidents and the 'zero trust' principle. New security solutions relying on artificial intelligence technology are being introduced with respect to all networks and services.

The company is also constantly making sure that its internal rules, guidelines and protocols are up-to-date (also by commissioning external audits), and to re-certify the processes and services in line with the ISO 23001 and ISO 27001 standards. It constantly ensures that its security experts receive education, training and new competencies, and actively participate in international cybersecurity exercises to allow them to build their skill-sets and obtain valuable experience. Telekom Slovenije is the only company in Slovenia to become an accredited member of the international organisation Trusted Introducer (the only other Slovenian organisation to become an accredited Trusted Introducer member is the Slovenian Computer Emergency Response Team).

Cybersecurity is a strategic priority at Telekom Slovenije, as shown by the modern Cyber Security Operations Centre that adopts the best practices in the field. ◆

SLOVENIA – a green and safe country with a sporting heart

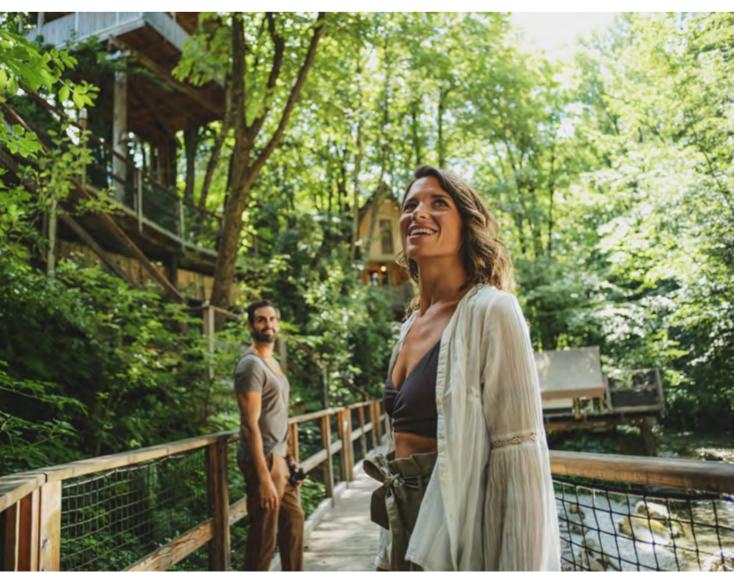Slovenia is one of the world's greenest and safest countries featuring diverse natural and cultural beauties that accompany you at every step. Although small in size, it contains four different regions: the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Pannonian Plain, and the Karst. Here, you can find any number of things to do, including active holidays and exploring nature, pampering yourself at spa resorts, cultural spots and superb restaurants. What they all have in common is sustainability, as reflected in care for the environment, tradition, and the well-being of the locals. This means both diversity and excitement are guaranteed.
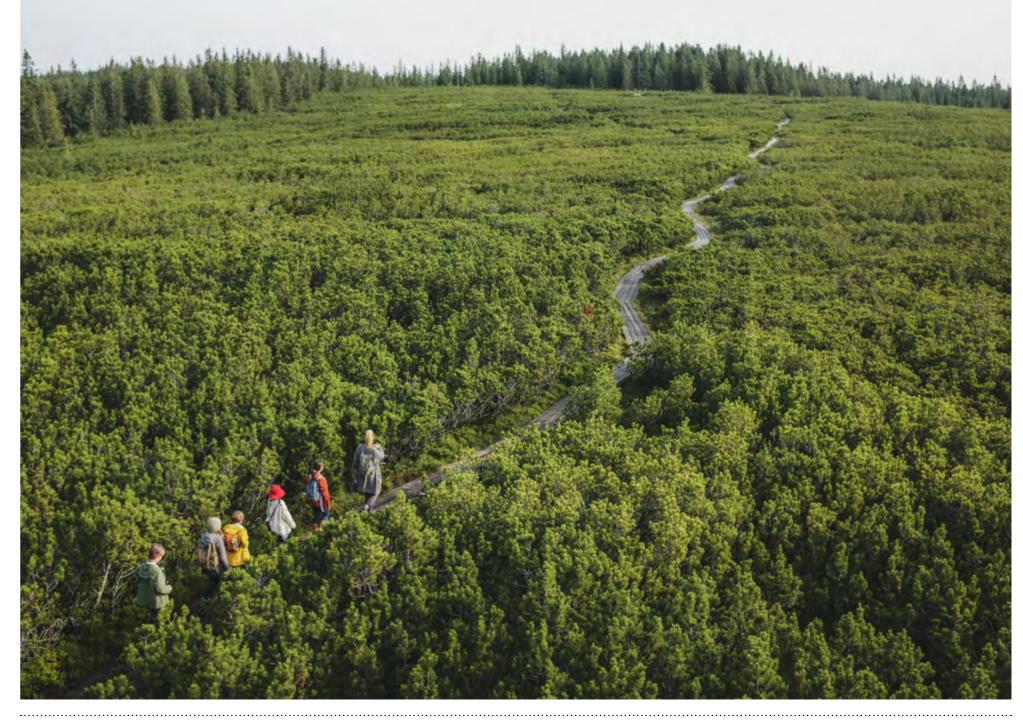
Adventure at every turn

Slovenia is your perfect choice for your next unforgettable European adventure. Why not start your adventure in Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana? Declared the Green Capital of Europe in 2016 and selected as the European Best Destination of 2022, the city boasts a charming old town with beautiful architecture, including the creations of Slovenia's greatest architect Jože Plečnik that are included among UNESCO's heritage sites. Another undeniable Instagram-worthy highlight is Bled set among the mighty peaks of the Julian Alps. Bled's emerald green lake with a picture-postcard church perched on a small islet is perhaps Slovenia's most famous natural beauty. Ad-

venturers can enjoy the many hiking, biking canyoning and watersports opportunities available in the area, while those who like a slower pace can indulge in a slice of traditional Bled cream cake at one of the many cafes dotted along the shoreline. Alternatively, you can choose to go on a journey to the coast or the eastern part of Slovenia and its numerous spa resorts. Slovenia's coastline is modest yet beautiful, with a handful of sun-drenched coastal towns famous for their production of wine, olive oil and salt. Among Slovenia's three main seaside towns – Koper, Izola and Piran – it is the latter that is arguably most impressive. With its Venetian Gothic architecture, the old town of Piran is one of the best-preserved historical towns anywhere in the Mediterranean.

Adventure even awaits visitors underground. Do you know that Slovenia has as many as 13,000 caves, with new ones being discovered all the time? The most impressive are certainly the Postojna Cave and the UNESCO-listed Škocjan Caves. These subterranean wonders are among the world's most captivating caves with magnificent formations and diverse fauna. Not to mention Postojna's most iconic inhabitant: the famous 'baby dragon'. If you head eastwards, make sure to stop at one of the spa resorts which can be found around the area – while some also exist elsewhere in Slovenia, the eastern part of Slovenia is really packed with them. You can choose just the right health resort for you according to the region or what your body needs, what your inner self is calling out for, and what kind of a getaway you and your family are seeking.

A leading culinary destination in Europe

Slovenia has in recent years established itself as one of Europe's most exciting culinary destinations. The country was named European Region of Gastronomy 2021

whereas the latest edition of the Michelin guide to Slovenia includes 6 Slovenian restaurants which it has awarded with its famous stars. One of these is owned by Ana Roš, named the world's best female chef in 2017 and today the proud owner of 2 Michelin stars at her restaurant Hiša Franko. And what better to accompany first-class food than top-notch wine? Slovenian winemaking tradition goes back centuries. The fertile soil is suitable for 52 varieties of wine, including the country's own "Teran", a full-bodied wine grown from the rich red soils of the Karst region.

Country of champions

As the only country in Europe in which four geographical worlds meet, Slovenia is a natural playground with an astonishing diversity of terrain that invites you to spend time outdoors; whether in the mountains, among the rolling hills, along the coastline and in the sea, in the green forests, by the rivers and lakes or even in the caves. Unique and unforgettable active adventures are guaranteed, no matter the season, as also shown by the fact that Slovenia is home to so many world-renowned athletes and a country holding huge potential for large international events. Tadej Pogačar, Primož Roglič, Luka Dončić and many other Slovenian names in the world of sports fill headlines in the world's media. The incredible achievements of athletes from Slovenia have led some people to even start thinking that we come from another planet. No, we come from Slovenia, the small green country in Central Europe with a big sporting heart! ◆

Online

To check out the latest Young BSF and BSF programmes, speakers' biographies and other latest updates and news, scan the code below.
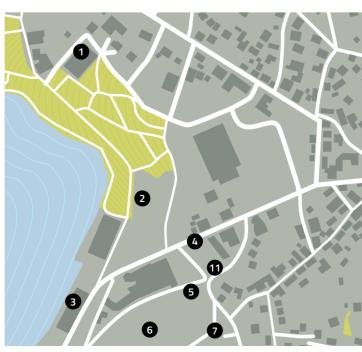
BSF programme

Who is who

Getting around BSF: Map of Bled

1 Bled Festival Hall (Cesta svobode 11)
2 Hotel Park (Cesta svobode 15)
3 Grand Hotel Toplice (Cesta svobode 12)
4 Best Western Premier Hotel Lovec (Ljubljanska cesta 6)
5 Kompas Hotel Bled (Cankarjeva 2)
6 Rikli Balance Hotel (ex Hotel Golf) (Cankarjeva 4)
7 Hotel Savica Garni (Cankarjeva 6)
8 Hotel Astoria (Prešernova 44)
9 Vila Zlatorog (Veslaška promenada 9)
10 Vila Bled (Cesta svobode 18)
11 Shuttle Point

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