

DIRE STRAITS AND SAFE PASSAGES

28–29 June 2024

Dubrovnik - Croatia

CONTEXT

Massive tragedies caused by wars and hostilities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, but also the aggravation of tensions in the Indo-Pacific and instability in Central and South America show us that all corners of the globe face violent conflicts or insecurity. These regional conflicts and crises run in parallel with the accelerating great power competition, jeopardising global trade relations and disrupting vital supply chains worldwide. All this indicates that the risk of a wider confrontation should not be underestimated. In the face of these threatening challenges, how can we avoid even more dire straits? How can we chart safe passages towards peace?

Large parts of humanity are rightfully longing for better living conditions and the reduction of global structural asymmetries. No part of the world is spared from the ramifications of human-made climate change. Refugees of war and natural catastrophes, along with migrants seeking a better life, reshape societies on all continents. National politics, regional organisations and the international multilateral order itself grapple with these new realities and the need to adjust to the new circumstances. How can we chart a safe course through these long-term challenges and bypass dire straits that hinder solutions?

The answer lies in building a new vision for the cooperation between the West and the Global South. This will require the overcoming of the simplistic division of the world in two camps, which are actually deeply interconnected vessels. For this reason, one of the main emphases of this year's Dubrovnik Forum is to provide a platform for an open exchange of views and practical ideas fostering that vision between the North and the South, the East and the West.

Another central emphasis of this year's Dubrovnik Forum will be the transatlantic community and the future of Europe. In 2024, crucial elections are being held on both sides of the Atlantic. First citizens, then elected politicians have to make serious choices with far-reaching impact on internal politics as well as on world affairs. What are the dire straits here, where are the safe passages? As in previous years, special focus will be devoted to the Western Balkans and their Euro-Atlantic path.

The unique feature of this year's Forum will be a discussion on the role of AI in diplomacy and global governance, alongside a dedicated event for young leaders and the special OECD Dubrovnik Talks.

The Forum will convene in the historic city of Dubrovnik, a symbol of openness arising from Croatia's and Dubrovnik's longstanding role as a bridge between diverse cultures and peoples and its global merchant and seafaring tradition.

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Friday, 28 June 2024

Young Leaders' Event

Transatlantic Partnership and the Changing Global Order: An Opportunity for Transatlantic Young Leaders to Forge a Secure and Innovative Future?

The current international landscape presents a multitude of challenges – increasing geopolitical and geo-economic tensions, deepening social divisions, climate change and the competition for energy and other valuable resources. In this context, a strong and collaborative relationship between North America and Europe is more crucial than ever since the end of the Cold War. This is where transatlantic young leaders come in with their energy, innovative spirit, and fresh perspectives. How can they contribute to a better understanding among transatlantic allies and breathe new life into this strategic partnership? What do the transatlantic partners have to change and improve in order to strengthen the cooperation between the West and the Global South?

Working Sessions

“A Still Point of the Turning World”:

Legacy of NATO in the Changing International Geopolitical Landscape

In the year when Croatia marks the 15th anniversary of its membership in the Alliance, NATO celebrates 75 years of its existence. The preparations for the anniversary summit, taking place in Washington this July, are in full swing. For 75 years, NATO has been an indispensable tool for peace, stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. However, with Russia's attack on Ukraine, the strategic security environment of the Alliance has been gravely altered. Against this backdrop, Allies have taken bold decisions to prove NATO's enduring role. Covering a population of more than 900 million people, with \$1.3 trillion in defence spending, NATO will be expected to demonstrate strength, unity and collective resolve. This panel will serve to discuss some of the key questions days before the leaders gather. Will the European Allies manage to take up more prominent role in burden sharing? How will the Alliance manage Ukrainian expectations about the membership? What is NATO's policy when it comes to China and its strategic alignment with Russia?

Clearing Paths, Building Futures: Mine Action for the Peace Formula

This panel will discuss land remediation and demining that is a prerequisite for recovery and reconstruction as outlined in Ukraine's Peace Formula. Due to Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine is consequently the largest mined territory in the world, with 156 000 km² of suspected hazardous area, surpassing such former frontrunners as Afghanistan and Syria. The task ahead for Ukrainian authorities in this field is paramount and it requires assistance and expertise of international partners in terms of financing, know-how and machinery.

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Endorsing Sustainable Investments to Reduce Development Challenges: Multi-stakeholder Approach

This panel discussion will focus on the critical role of sustainable investments in addressing the pressing challenges of development in emerging economies. As we approach the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the need for substantial investment to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is more urgent than ever. This dialogue will explore how multi-stakeholder collaboration can catalyse the flow of capital towards sustainable projects that not only drive economic growth but also create decent jobs and ensure environmental conservation and social inclusivity.

Building Out the Three Seas Initiative's Next Decade

As the Three Seas Initiative passes its ninth summit and looks towards its next decade, Europe finds itself in a geopolitical moment that underscores the Initiative's potential and urgency. Its potential is defined by the region's \$2 trillion GDP that is projected to grow by 35% by 2040. Its urgency lies in the \$500 billion to \$1 trillion infrastructure deficit and a need to strengthen the region's connectivity and economic resilience in the context of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. Looking ahead, how can the Three Seas cement its role in Europe and achieve its goal of bringing greater prosperity and security to its part of Europe? This panel discussion will explore the Initiative's biggest successes from the past decade, the lessons learned, and the priorities and opportunities that should define its agenda in the years to come, including the Initiative's relationship with Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans.

OECD Dubrovnik Talks

Digital and Green SMEs: Accelerating the Twin Transitions in the Western Balkans

Building upon its long-standing expertise in undertaking in-depth policy assessments and providing policy advice to WB6, the OECD, with the support of the Croatian government, is engaged in a project aiming to support the twin transitions of SMEs in the region. The objective of this event will be to officially launch the project on Accelerating SMEs' Digital and Green Transitions in the Western Balkans. The event will gather high-level stakeholders from six participating economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), Croatia, and the OECD member states. It will be the opportunity to: share global and regional insights on accelerating SMEs' green and digital transitions; establish regional policy priorities and key reform areas, as well as assess current efforts and barriers to developing the green-digital nexus in the Western Balkans.

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Saturday, 29 June 2024

Working Sessions

Leaders' Panel

North-South, East-West: In Search of Safe Passages

All corners of the globe face violent conflicts or insecurity: from ongoing wars and hostilities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, to the aggravation of tensions in the Indo-Pacific and instability in Central and South America. As we behold major shifts in the global balance of power and the emergence of numerous global threats such as climate change and pandemics, it is crucial to find a common language in facing common challenges. Emphasizing inclusive policies and shared responsibilities is vital for progress. A step in the right direction should be the building of mutual trust and acknowledgment of distinct perspectives and aspirations of the Global South as a precondition for the inception of a genuine dialogue that could (one day) yield a common ground on numerous difficulties that burden both hemispheres. Time is of the essence. How can we avoid even more dire straits and chart safe passages towards peace? Is the West ready for a more balanced and cooperative global partnership with the Global South and vice versa?

Leaders' Panel

Connecting the Dots: Reliable Supply Chains and Maritime Security

In Homer's "Odyssey", sailors passing through the Strait of Messina were threatened by two mythical creatures, Scylla and Charybdis. Thousands of years forward, the threats to maritime security have resurfaced, as we witness the attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea or ponder the impact of rising geopolitical tensions on future maritime trade. The global supply chains are under a huge strain, just at a time when the global interdependence has reached historic levels. From food, energy to critical raw materials – our joint prosperity increasingly depends on the safe passages, which also provide a lifeline for humanitarian aid to the growing number of conflict zones across the world. In the current climate of geopolitical tensions, we need to transcend the zero-sum thinking and acknowledge that the reawakening of Scylla and Charybdis affects all of us. In this context, the main question of this panel will be – how can we overcome our differences and seek "win-win" solutions to foster maritime security and protect our critical supply chains?

Quo Vadis, Europa?

In the world currently undergoing one of its highly intense transformative periods, confrontation and disregard of established international norms are coming to the fore. Ongoing global transitions have affected the European Union profoundly as its success is largely dependent on the rules-based international order. Can the EU emerge from this turbulent period stronger and more influential on the

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world stage? Internally, it must fortify itself – addressing its weaknesses and fostering greater unity among member states. Externally, it needs to engage with global actors effectively, promoting its values and interests while carving out a space for itself in the new geopolitical landscape. How can the EU best ensure a synergy between self-reliance and credible, lasting partnerships? The course of the war in Ukraine and the Middle East crisis, the new European Parliament and the EU's new institutional leadership, as well as the outcome of the November US presidential elections will all shape the EU's trajectory. A prolonged period of possibly difficult changes related to growing securitization, solidarity and unity issues, twin transitions and novel demographic solutions could lead to further polarization. How can Europe address the challenges that lie ahead?

Western Balkans: Unlocking the Reform Potential

Twenty years after the so-called big bang enlargement, the EU's largest enlargement so far, often described as one of the boldest moments of Europe's post-World War II history, the EU realizes that we have to be bold again, the same way we were 20 years ago. The enlargement is back on the agenda since the tectonic changes in Europe's security environment have opened a way for a more dynamic enlargement process. The EU has started strategic debates on how it can accommodate the intake of new members and prepare itself for new enlargements. The new geopolitical moment and the renewed interest in enlargement present a window of opportunity for Western Balkans countries. The new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans should strengthen the transformative potential of the enlargement process and incentivize reforms in the region, thus giving a fresh impetus to the process based on the rule of law and reforms as the only way to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU. How can we further reinforce the aspirations and the ambitions of the Western Balkans? Is the expressed ambition that both sides should be ready for enlargement by the end of this decade realistic? What are the key challenges in both the EU and in the Western Balkans?

Africa In Focus: Shifting the Paradigms Together

From the catastrophic war in Sudan, to the instability in much of the Sahel region and the devastating consequences of climate change and food insecurity, the African continent faces a prolonged period of crisis and uncertainty. The involvement of various state and non-state actors with their special agendas and vested interests greatly complicates the picture. The polarisation of the international community disproportionately affects African countries. In fact, there is no other theatre where the global competition – including for critical resources – plays out in such a clear and explicit way. To reverse this trend, the key stakeholders should acknowledge that the action based on pure self-interest, without regard for consequences, comes with a hefty price tag – first and foremost for Africa, but also for the world at large. African countries try hard to best coordinate the most important current policies and the African Union has recently finally joined the G20. However, numerous complex challenges stand before African countries individually and before African regional and pan-African organizations in pursuit of a stronger global voice. In the current highly polarized international context, is it possible for competing actors to transcend their narrow agendas and forge a less divisive and more collaborative approach to promote stability in Africa? Are there areas where division can ultimately be replaced with cooperation, whether we talk about investment projects, humanitarian and development assistance, or comprehensive peace initiatives?

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sAiling Through the Digital StrAIts

This panel will explore the multifaceted impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing on international relations, focusing on both opportunities and challenges in areas like security, diplomacy, defence, global governance and economy. We will analyse how AI and quantum computing can potentially reshape geopolitical landscape, cooperation frameworks and global leadership, while also highlighting the need for responsible development, international collaboration, value-based and regulatory considerations. The panel will be a moderated discussion featuring diverse perspectives from thought leaders representing the EU institutions, international organizations, government, academia and industry.

