

DUBROVNIK FORUM 2026

THE AGE OF MULTIPOLARITY: Many Directions, One Future

CONCEPT NOTE

Dubrovnik, 26-27 June 2026

CONTEXT

Set against the stunning backdrop of Dubrovnik, a city historically hailed for its culture, trade and skilled diplomacy, **this year's Dubrovnik Forum** offers a timely platform to reflect on the complexities of a rapidly evolving global order. Much like the former Dubrovnik Republic, which skilfully balanced between competing powers, countries of today navigate a **turbulent world** that is characterized by polarization, fierce competition for resources, shifting alliances and new power paradigms.

The **global order** continues to face tectonic changes, from an unprecedented wave of interconnected crises, to conflicts in **Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia**, economic shocks, energy volatility, shifting trade agendas and climate crisis, highlighting the need for dialogue and cooperation while ensuring that diverse voices, interests and concerns are heard and taken into account.

This year's the **19th edition** of the Forum will also mark the **20th anniversary** of the Forum's inauguration in 2006, known as the Croatia Summit at that time. The Forum will bring together top-notch policymakers, scholars, business leaders and civil society actors from across the globe to generate actionable insights for navigating the **new multipolar world**. The focus will be on the emerging concept of **multipolarity**, shaping the event's agenda in light of recent international developments, and aiming to **foster dialogue** between **Western countries** and countries of the **Global South**, thereby **amplifying diverse voices**. The conference's global outlook will be enriched by discussions with key stakeholders from **Southeast Europe**, offering unique insight into challenges and prospects of that region. Keeping in step with the spirit of the times, the Forum will seek to offer **fresh perspectives** on several contentious issues, including the **evolving values agenda** and its implications on foreign affairs.

As Croatia chairs the **EU MED9** and the **Three Seas Initiative (3SI)** in 2026, the Forum will place a special emphasis on **Mediterranean** perspectives and **shared strategic priorities**. This year, the Forum will also broaden its scope by introducing a dedicated youth dimension through the **Dubrovnik Youth Forum (DYF)**, which will take place from 24 to 28 June 2026 on the margins of the Dubrovnik Forum.

As a historic hub of dialogue and exchange, **Dubrovnik** offers an **ideal setting** for discussions leading to a better understanding of multipolarity and shaping strategies for a more resilient, secure and interconnected world.

PROVISIONAL LIST OF PANELS¹

Friday, 26 June 2026

Digital Resilience and AI: Integrating Infrastructure, Data and Security for EU Global Competitiveness

Event organized by the New Frontier Foundation

In the context of accelerating **digital transformation**, this panel explores the critical synergy between three pillars of the modern economy: **physical infrastructure** (data centres), **advanced security solutions** and **artificial intelligence**. As the EU strives to strengthen its global competitiveness, the key question is no longer solely the development of AI technologies but also ensuring resilient and scalable infrastructure to support them, while upholding high security standards. The aim of the discussion is to identify how Croatia and EU Member States can leverage their **infrastructural potential** to become leaders in the deployment of **AI solutions**, as well as what is required to attract investment in data centres and the accompanying energy and related infrastructure, while simultaneously ensuring cyber resilience.

Think Tank Panel: Emerging Powers in a Multipolar World – Many Paths, One Destination

The international system is undergoing a **historic transformation**, marked by the diffusion of political and economic power, weakening of global governance institutions, rise of influential regional actors and recalibration of long-standing alliances. Growing transnational challenges further accelerate the shift toward a more complex, **multipolar international system**. In this new context, the **EU** seeks to maintain its commitment to multilateralism and a rules-based order, prioritizing stability through normative and institutional engagement. The **U.S.** pursues its own strategic priorities while its competition with China and its active engagement across various regions increasingly shape the global agenda. Major players such as **China and India** are asserting themselves with growing confidence, while groupings such as **BRICS** continue expanding their scope and influence. At the same time, a range of new, emerging actors across **Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America** are contributing to the new regional dynamics. This think tank panel examines what shape the new global order may take in the years to come; how emerging powers will define their roles; where the interests of “challengers” and “status quo” powers may align or diverge; and what opportunities for constructive cooperation - rather than falling into a Thucydides Trap - exist in an increasingly competitive geopolitical arena.

The Energy Competition in a Multipolar World: How to Strengthen Europe’s Sovereignty and Resilience?

Europe is facing pressing challenges in **energy security**, amplified by instability in the Middle East and its repercussions for global energy markets. Today it imports 95% of its oil, 90% of its gas and two-thirds of its coal, and external shocks can easily affect its economic security, sovereignty and resilience, as well as the affordability of energy, given that Europe generally has had some of the world's **highest energy costs**, particularly for industry. We are also witnessing the strengthening of strategic dependencies on critical raw materials and on advanced green technologies, whose supply chains are often concentrated in a limited number of countries outside Europe. **The energy transition** has thus become a question of **geopolitical security**. Croatia is emerging as a **key energy hub** in the region, offering opportunities to strengthen regional energy security, particularly in the context of phasing out of Russian gas. New initiatives and options such as geothermal energy, hydrogen and especially Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) as part of the “new nuclear era”, are gaining increased attention across Europe and the world at large. Yet a **critical question** remains - given Europe’s limited energy sources, rising energy costs and huge future infrastructure and electricity needs, including those related to AI development and data centres, can Europe secure its energy sovereignty and emerge as a truly competitive and independent force in a multipolar world?

¹ The organizers reserve the right to amend the schedule, speakers or programme content at their discretion and at any time, without prior notice.

Geopolitics of Artificial Intelligence: Who will Rule the Digital Future?

Artificial Intelligence has moved beyond a technological breakthrough to become a **central arena** in the contest for global power. Nations are investing hundreds of billions in AI research, development and deployment, recognizing that leadership in this field will **shape the geopolitics of the future**. The global AI landscape is defined by **intense competition**. The **United States** and **China** lead the innovation race driven by diverse approaches to AI, standards and ecosystems; the **EU** focuses on regulation and human-centric application of the new technology; and other countries seek to carve out their own strategic niches. Control over AI infrastructure, access to advanced semiconductors, as well as the ability to attract top talent are increasingly viewed as **critical strategic assets**, even as further development of AI carries significant **ethical, regulatory and security risks**. This panel will explore pathways to **navigate** the global AI race, examining strategies for international cooperation, trade, health security, responsible innovation and ensuring that AI serves shared prosperity, security and long-term **stability** instead of leading humanity into a **dystopian future**.

Supply Chains and Trade Under Fire: Maritime Security at a Point of No Return?

With deepening conflicts across the Middle East region, affecting key maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, **maritime security** has become a major geopolitical and economic challenge with global consequences. Attacks on energy infrastructure and vessels, military escalation and the **weaponization of sea lanes** are disrupting flows of oil, gas, fertilizers and critical raw materials, triggering energy shocks, inflation and downgraded growth forecasts. Rising insurance costs and reliance on naval protection further strain trade. These disruptions are not only destabilizing markets and affecting millions of people but also exposing the **structural fragility** of global supply chains and the deep **dependence** of many states on vulnerable maritime corridors. As **energy security** becomes inseparable from maritime security, these dynamics could lead to accelerating geopolitical fragmentation, reshaping alliances and redefining domestic political agendas and national strategic priorities, while potentially leading to a total breakdown of international rules. In an environment where **disruption** is no longer an exception but a persistent feature, this panel will explore how to restore maritime security, keep essential supply chains operational and safeguard the uninterrupted flow of critical goods and energy.

Regional Launch of the Industrial Development Report 2026

Industrial Futures: Transforming Eastern Europe and Central Asia towards a Sustainable Industrial Future

Event organized by the UNIDO

The global economy is undergoing profound **structural transformation**. Successive **shocks**, including escalating climate impacts, political tensions and supply chain disruptions, have placed sustained pressure on growth, stability and development progress across many regions. Poverty and food insecurity persist at alarming levels, while inequality and environmental degradation risk intensifying if current trends continue. At the same time, powerful forces such as the clean energy transition, rapid digitalization and artificial intelligence, the reconfiguration of global value chains and the transformation of food systems are reshaping industrial systems worldwide. In this evolving environment, **industrial development** remains a central pathway for long-term economic transformation. The **Industrial Development Report (IDR)** is the flagship publication of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and a key analytical contribution to global industrial development discourse. The 2026 edition focuses on "The Future of Industrialization", in line with UNIDO's Vision 2050. The report analyses how **global megatrends** are redefining industrial development and examines how modern industries can evolve to become greener, more digital, more resilient and more inclusive. It provides forward-looking scenarios and practical policy guidance to support countries in building sustainable and competitive industrial ecosystems.

Melting Ice, Rising Stakes: Critical Materials, Geopolitical Competition and Global Health

This panel explores how **critical materials** are reshaping geopolitics, redefining military and economic power, and increasingly affecting global health security and societal resilience. The Arctic serves as a powerful illustration of this transformation: as melting ice opens new strategic frontiers, competition over resources, technological

leadership and supply-chain control is accelerating. From **rare earth elements** to **semiconductor-related minerals** to **critical medicines**, access to essential resources — as well as the capacity to process and manufacture them — remains highly uneven. These **asymmetries** are creating new **strategic dependencies** and intensifying **geopolitical competition** amid growing tensions and **supply-chain disruptions**. Critical materials are indispensable not only for the **green and digital transitions** and **defence industries**, but also for **healthcare systems**. At the same time, shortages of **critical medicines** are exposing the vulnerabilities of globally concentrated production networks. By bringing together perspectives from governments, academia and international organisations, this session examines how the race for critical materials is reshaping the global order. It asks what policies, partnerships and cooperative frameworks are needed to strengthen resilience and move **beyond a zero-sum game** toward more stable, sustainable and equitable approaches.

OECD Dubrovnik Talks

Navigating Global Shocks: Green and Digital Transitions for South East European Businesses

Event organized by the OECD

Recent geopolitical tensions, including the escalation of conflict in the Middle East, are having far reaching **economic effects**, contributing to volatility in energy markets, inflationary pressures, and uncertainties in global supply chains. For businesses in South East Europe, understanding how to **respond to these trends** — including the transition to green and digital models — and accelerating efforts for greater market integration will be critical for resilience, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. In this context, drawing on the OECD's recent business survey and SME Policy Index 2026 report, this session will explore how firms in South East Europe are responding to these pressures and discuss the policy frameworks that can support their adaptation and integration into European value chains.

Cognitive Warfare in a Multipolar World Enhanced by Artificial Intelligence

In a time of accelerating multipolarity, geopolitical instability, high-intensity kinetic warfare and hybrid threats, the **limits of traditional defence doctrines** are strategically evident. The transformation from a European defence strategy based on kinetic power to more cognitive capabilities addressing cognitive disinformation, manipulation and contamination of informational space, deserves greater attention. In a technologically connected multipolar world marked by cognitive warfare and social networks, adversaries target human cognition, emotion, belief, trust and decision-making to destabilize democratic societies through disinformation and divergent media campaigns with consequences for global defence and security. A new paradigm integrating AI, cognitive neuroscience and cognitively enhanced strategic decision-making can strengthen European political governance amid unprecedented defence complexity. The development of a **strategic defence ecosystem** based on cognitive dominance, societal resilience and competent civil and military leadership requires joint efforts. Emerging digital technologies, like AI and cognitive neuroscience, act as influential soft power, enhancing kinetic hard power and overall defence capabilities through anticipation, prevention, adaptive AI-driven decision support and emotionally based strategic communication. Such an **interdisciplinary approach** can improve operational capabilities, effectiveness and ultimately security and stability in a multipolar world.

Saturday, 27 June 2026

The Age of Multipolarity: Navigating New Realities

Over three decades after the optimism that followed the end of the Cold War, the international system is undergoing a **profound transformation**. The once-dominant assumption that liberal democracy and global economic integration would define a stable, singular path forward has been challenged by the rise of multiple centres of power, diverse political models and renewed geopolitical competition. Today's **emerging multipolarity** is shaped not only by states but also by regional blocs, technological ecosystems, competition for resources and new forms of ideological and cultural influence. This panel explores how the transition from a unipolar to a more fragmented global order affects international politics and how states and societies can **better navigate new realities** in an increasingly pluralistic yet contested international landscape.

One Sea, Many Partners: A Mediterranean that Delivers for All

This panel takes place as Croatia chairs the **EU MED9** and actively supports the **Pact for the Mediterranean** as a framework for cooperation aimed at strengthening connectivity, resilience, prosperity and security across the region, against the backdrop of growing geopolitical and security challenges in the wider neighbourhood. The Mediterranean remains a space of deep interdependence, with northern and southern shores linked by shared economic ambitions, security concerns, environmental challenges and longstanding cultural and human ties. Rather than framing the region through a narrative of fragmentation, the panel explores how the Mediterranean can generate **tangible benefits** for all its societies. By putting **people at the centre** of cooperation, the panel will highlight a shared commitment to promoting peace, stability and sustainable development across both shores of the Mediterranean.

Beyond the Peace Dividend: Modern Warfare, Defence Industry and Europe's Strategic Choices

Europe's security environment is undergoing its most profound transformation since the end of the Cold War. Russia's war against Ukraine, shifting U.S. priorities, rising global and hybrid threats and rapid technological change are reshaping Europe's approach to defence and deterrence. This panel examines Europe's evolving security and defence landscape through the lens of **modern warfare and defence industry**. Panellists will discuss lessons learned from current conflicts, including how drones, AI and other emerging technologies are **transforming modern warfare** and **creating new opportunities for national defence industries**. The discussion will also address how, and whether, Europe can **take greater responsibility** for its own defence, by strengthening its industrial base, scaling up production capacities and fostering deeper cooperation across the European defence industry.

Universal Values in a Multipolar World: What Can We Learn from Each Other?

In an era of geopolitical fragmentation, identity politics and diverging interpretations of shared values, the idea of "**universal values**" is under renewed scrutiny. **Freedom of thought, conscience and religion** is under pressure, with Christians being the most persecuted religious group worldwide. **Freedom of speech and expression** also illustrates differing worldviews: while some societies treat it as an almost absolute right, others limit expression to achieve different social, political or ideological goals. These variations in views shape not only domestic debates within the Western societies and the transatlantic community, but also international discussions on the **universality of rights**. At the same time, global challenges demand cooperation grounded in at least some **shared ethical principles**. This panel brings together voices from diverse cultural, social, political and regional backgrounds to explore whether, and how, universal values can still guide global dialogue and action. How to **protect democratic processes** from foreign interference while carefully avoiding excessive regulation, polarisation or abuse? Are universal values truly attainable, or must they be **interpreted** in light of different historical, cultural, religious and national **contexts**? And perhaps most importantly: who has the **authority to judge** whether a certain value is genuinely universal? Rather than reiterating entrenched positions, the discussion aims to bridge conceptual divides and explore whether it is possible to find common ground in the increasingly polarised and divisive values landscape.

Africa's Evolving Role in a Multipolar World: Geopolitics, Growth and Global Influence

Long seen and understood through external optics, the African continent is now undergoing a **rapid transformation** that increasingly positions it as an emerging actor in global politics and economics. Dynamic economic growth, rapid demographic expansion, deepening regional integration, diversified international partnerships and intensifying great-power competition are collectively **reshaping Africa's geopolitical landscape**. Simultaneously, evolving security challenges, political transitions and technological innovation contribute to a complex yet highly dynamic picture of a **continent on the rise**. Africa is emerging as a central arena in the global redistribution of power, driven by its abundant natural resources, human capital, growing markets, strategic location and expanding influence in international politics, diplomacy and trade. This panel will explore the opportunities and challenges this transformation presents for Africa, Europe and the wider world.

Clearing the Ground for Lasting Peace: Demining at the Frontline of Food Security and Geopolitics

Mine action today is not only a humanitarian issue but also a geopolitical one. From Ukraine to Cambodia and other conflict-affected regions, **landmines** and explosive remnants of war continue to shape realities on the ground long after fighting ends. They slow recovery, delay political stabilisation, limit state authority over territory and hinder economic development. **Demining**, in this sense, is not only about safety, but about restoring order, re-establishing state control, reviving economic activity and creating conditions for lasting peace. Its impact on food security is especially critical, as contaminated farmland limits production and trade. At a time of fragile supply chains and rising geopolitical tensions, this turns mine action into a strategic priority, not just a technical task. Croatia, now **fully cleared of landmines** after more than three decades, offers valuable experience and expertise while supporting other affected countries. This panel will explore how **mine action** can be placed higher on the international agenda, as a tool for stability, security and resilience in today's conflict-ridden world.

Asia-Pacific in Motion: New Powers, Old Rivalries

The **rise of new and middle powers**, deepening economic integration, intensifying security competition and the evolution of regional institutions have collectively reshaped strategic dynamics from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, positioning the region as the **world's new economic and strategic centre of gravity**. Whether framed as Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific, this region has long been characterized by enduring rivalries, maritime disputes, competing security architectures and historical grievances, but is now witnessing an accelerated **redistribution of power**. As the global power reshuffle continues, the Asia-Pacific remains a central arena for understanding the dynamics of a shifting world order. This panel directly contributes to the conference's broader theme by unpacking how emerging powers and old rivalries intersect to shape the future of regional and global stability.

Between Power Centres: Lessons from Multi-Vector Diplomacy

As great-power rivalry intensifies and rules-based security arrangements weaken, countries face mounting pressure to align with competing blocs, often at the cost of autonomy and resilience. This panel examines the **multi-vector foreign policy approach**, highlighting the complex balancing act countries perform as they engage simultaneously with multiple global powers while avoiding dependence on any single one. Beyond individual strategies, the discussion will explore what others can learn from their pragmatic statecraft, including a growing emphasis on **regional integration** as a way to amplify collective voice, reduce vulnerability and contribute to stability in an increasingly volatile international environment.

The EU and the Western Balkans: Resolving Unfinished Business Together (I & II)

The EU's engagement with the **Western Balkans** has gained renewed **strategic urgency** in a more fragmented and competitive European security environment. At a time when geopolitical competition increasingly extends into Europe's immediate neighbourhood, the Western Balkans have become a key test of the EU's ability to act strategically, credibly and consistently. While accession remains a **transformative goal**, progress across the region continues to be uneven and hinges on credible reforms, particularly in the area of the **rule of law**, delivered through a **merit-based process**. At the same time, the current **geopolitical context** raises a broader question - **can the EU maintain the integrity of a merit-based enlargement process while responding to growing**

strategic pressures and the need for faster geopolitical consolidation? The panel will also explore how **shifts in transatlantic priorities** and coordination may shape the Western Balkans' strategic choices, reform incentives and alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). From the perspective of EU member states with direct experience of enlargement, moving from promises to implementation is essential - not only to complete Europe's political architecture, but also to ensure long-term stability, security and prosperity in the EU's immediate neighbourhood.
