



CENTRAL EUROPE: NAVIGATING THE GEOPOLITICAL STORM
How Can Europe's Citizens Engage the Next Decade?

24 April 2025

Radisson Blu Carlton Hotel, Hviezdoslavovo námestie 3, Bratislava

Organized by

Institute of European Democrats

Under the Auspices of

H.E. Apoorva Srivastava, Ambassador of India to Slovakia

In Partnership with

Slovak-India Friendship Society

With the Presence of

Euro-Atlantic Center, Institute for Public Affairs, Adapt Institute, Confident Slovakia (Sebavedomé Slovensko), Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Otvorená Hra & Open Academy

We find ourselves at a crucial moment, facing an ever more complex and uncertain world. The very foundation of our societies is being challenged by shifts in global politics, the spread of disinformation, and the urgent need to address global crises. These anxieties aren't limited to Central Europe; they echo across the continent. There's a real fear of history repeating itself, of our region once again becoming a battleground for major power struggles. We're concerned about the damaging effects of manipulated information and the growing distrust in our democratic institutions.

However, even amidst these concerns, there's a strong call to action, a recognition that we are not passive observers. Inspired by the 'complex thought' of Edgar Morin, whose work 'La Méthode' highlights the interconnectedness of systems, we're here to explore solutions that integrate diverse perspectives. We must move beyond simple explanations and understand the nuanced realities of our world. We firmly believe in the power of engaged citizens and democratically elected leaders to shape a better future. We need to find ways to strengthen social unity, build resilience against modern threats, and encourage a culture where people listen, dialogue, and create solutions together.

This conference isn't just a place for discussion; it's a call to action. We're here to find practical solutions, to empower citizens, and to contribute to a more stable and prosperous Europe. We must face the anxieties of our time with courage and creativity, and work together to build a world where peace, dignity, and shared values prevail.

9.30-10.00

Registration

10.00-10.30

Welcome Introductions

Mikel Burzako, CEO, Institute of European Democrats

Dr Anna Galovičová, Founder & President, Slovak-India Friendship Society

Alice Bernard-Montini, President, Young Democrats for Europe

György Gémesi, Lord Mayor, Gödöllő

Chair & Scene-Setter: **Mário Nicolini**, Co-founder, Confident Slovakia (Sebavedomé Slovensko); Honorary President, Euro-Atlantic Center

10.30-11.45

Panel 1: Survive and Prosper: Building Trust and Shared Values in a Complex World

Imagine Europe not just as a place of money and business, but as a community where everyone feels they belong and are valued. This panel will look at how we can build that kind of Europe. We'll talk about what makes a society truly successful—things like trust, strong communities, and fair systems for everyone. We want to find ways to bring people together, make sure everyone feels included, and figure out how Europe can better share its story with the world. Basically, we're asking: How can we make Europe a place where people don't just survive, but truly thrive, together?

- **Shared Values**—What are the basic things we all believe in as Europeans? How do we make sure those ideas are put into action?
- **Building Trust**—How do we get people to trust their leaders and each other, even when we're different?
- **Strong Communities**—How do we create neighborhoods and towns where people feel connected and supported?
- **Fair Systems**—How do we make sure everyone has a fair chance, no matter who they are?
- **Sharing Europe's Story**—How to win people's hearts and minds for Europe?

Ján Figel', First Slovak European Commissioner

Gabi Schmidt, Vice-President, Institute of European Democrats

Prof. Svetozár Krno, Constantin the Philosopher University Nitra

Akshay Kumar Dixit, Managing Director, Indiagate

Michal Šoltés, Co-founder, Otvorená Hra & Open Academy

Chair: **Ivo Kaplán**, President, European Institute Renaissance (Member of Institute of European Democrats)

11.45-12.15

India-Slovakia Partnership in the European Context: From President Murmu's Visit to Prime Minister Modi's Upcoming Journey

H.E. Apoorva Srivastava, Ambassador of India to Slovakia

12.15-13.15

Lunch

13.15-14.30

Panel 2: Navigating the Digital Age: Complex Thought and Responsible Citizenship

The internet gives us amazing freedom, but it also means we have big responsibilities. It's easy to get confused by fake news and to lose trust in what's real. Things are changing so fast, and it can be hard to know what to believe. This panel will help us learn how to think carefully, spot fake information, and make good choices online. We want to figure out how to be free online while still being responsible, create rules for how we use technology fairly, and teach everyone how to be good digital citizens. In short, we're asking: How can we use the internet to make our lives better, without getting lost in all the confusion?

- **Spotting Fake News**—How can we tell what's true online and what's not?
- **Freedom and Responsibility**—How can we say what we want online, but also be kind and respectful?
- **Rules for Technology**—How do we make sure technology is used fairly and ethically?
- **Learning to Be Digital Citizens**—How can schools and families help us become smart and responsible online users?

Dr Anna Galovičová, Founder & President, Slovak-India Friendship Society

Grigorij Mesežnikov, President, Institute for Public Affairs

Lutjona Lula, Founder, Erasmus Student Network Albania

Prof. R.S. Rathore, Dean, University of Haryana, India

Chair: **Alexandra Leuliette**, Local Representative of the Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem); Former Deputy Chief of Staff to the Secretary of State for Youth and Engagement, France

13.15-14.30

Young Leaders Round Table: One Europe, One Defence: A Dream or Reality? (Chatham House Rule, Invitation Only)

Recent shifts in global alliances and rising instability force us to ask if Europe can and should take charge of its own defence. Young leaders gathered by the Euro-Atlantic Center will dive into one of the most critical debates for Europe's future, exploring the question whether the idea of a single European defense force is a necessary step for navigating the geopolitical storm, or just a far-off dream? Essentially, we're asking: What is the future of European defence, and is unity the path to security and influence?

- **A United Force?**—Is a common European army realistic or even desirable compared to strengthening national forces? What are the pros and cons?
- **Standing Alone?**—Should Europe reduce its reliance on others (like the US/NATO) for its security? Is strategic autonomy the priority?
- **The Hurdles**—What are the biggest challenges—political, financial, logistical, and concerning national sovereignty—to creating a unified defence?
- **Global Impact**—How would a European army change relationships with the US, China, and Russia? Would it create more stability or tension?
- **Paying the Price**—How could the costs of enhanced European defence, unified or not, be shared fairly among member states?
- **Soft Power Europe**—What instruments other than military force or economic coercion (cultural, social, and intellectual) should Europe develop?

Introduction: **Alice Bernard-Montini**, President, Young Democrats for Europe
Chair: **Martin Sklenár**, Former Minister of Defence; Director, Defence and Security Programme, GLOBSEC

14.30-15.45

Panel 3: Strengthening Resilience: Countering Hybrid Threats and Geopolitical Instability

Democracies around the world are facing new challenges, with some countries becoming more authoritarian. These challenges are connected to each other, making things even more complicated. Many people are wondering how Europe should work with or without the United States. This panel will focus on how we can become stronger and more prepared to deal with these threats, both as a society and through our governments. We'll talk about how to spot and stop attacks from other countries, how to protect ourselves from instability, how to keep our important systems safe from cyberattacks, and how countries can work together to solve these problems. Basically, we're asking: How can we protect our democracies and make sure we can face the challenges of today and tomorrow?

- **Hidden Attacks**—How do we recognize and stop harmful information and attacks from other countries?
- **Staying Strong**—How do we protect ourselves from instability and changes around the world?
- **Keeping Things Safe Online**—How do we protect important systems, like hospitals and power grids, from cyberattacks?
- **Working Together**—How can countries work together to solve these big problems?

Philippe-Michel Kleisbauer, Delegate, European Democrats—European Democratic Party; Member, Executive Bureau presided by François Bayrou, Democratic Movement

Marcel Peško, Former Ambassador-at-large, Hybrid and Cyber Threats, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Business Development Manager (Cyber Security and Classified Information Solutions), Alison Slovakia

Arnaud de Vibraye, Manager for Invest4Cyber, European Cyber Security Organisation

Assoc. Prof. Branislav Kováčik, Dean, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations

Chair: **Iveta Kupková**, Independent Expert; Former Director, SITCEN, Government Office

15.45-16.15

Coffee Break

16.15-17.30

Panel 4: Envisioning Europe's Future: Citizen-Led Innovation and Sustainable Development

The future isn't something that just happens; it's something we build together! But right now, many people in Central Europe feel like their future is uncertain, and some are even thinking about leaving. This panel is about how we can work together to make things better. We'll talk about how to inspire people to believe in Europe again, what everyday people can do to make a difference in their communities and countries, and how to unleash everyone's creativity. We'll also discuss how to take care of our planet and create

new ideas and businesses that help everyone. Essentially, we're asking: How can we create a future where everyone feels hopeful and wants to stay, a future built on kindness, helping each other, and respect?

- **Believing in Europe**—How do we inspire people to feel enthusiastic about being part of Europe again?
- **Our Future Together**—What kind of Europe do we want to live in by 2050?
- **Making a Difference**—What to do in our daily lives to help build a better future?
- **International Connections**—How can democratic actors cooperate across Central and Eastern Europe?
- **Being Creative**—How do we encourage everyone to share their ideas and talents?
- **Taking Care of the Planet**—How do we make sure our future is sustainable and good for the environment?
- **Building New Ideas**—How do we support new businesses and ways of doing things that help everyone?

Miodrag Vlahović, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro

Alexandra Leuliette, Local Representative of the Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem);
Former Deputy Chief of Staff to the Secretary of State for Youth and Engagement, France

Mons. Marián Gavenda, Roman Catholic Priest, Author & Translator

Peter Jančovič, Lord Mayor of Piešťany

Dr Raj Nehru, Former Vice Chancellor, Vishwakarma Skill Development University;
Officer on Special Duty to Chief Minister, Government of Haryana Civil Secretariat, India
(video message)

Chair: **Mário Nicolini**, Co-founder, Confident Slovakia (Sebavedomé Slovensko);
Honorary President, Euro-Atlantic Center

17.30-18.00

Conference Wrap-Up

Gabi Schmidt, Vice-President, Institute of European Democrats

Mário Nicolini, Co-founder, Confident Slovakia (Sebavedomé Slovensko); Honorary
President, Euro-Atlantic Center

18.00-19.00

Glass of Wine & Small Refreshments

Organizer & Partners

Institute of European Democrats is a Brussels-based institute affiliated with the European Democratic Party (EDP). The IED fosters innovative ideas and debates on EU policies through events and publications. The IED is the organizer of the conference.



Slovak-India Friendship Society seeks solutions to current problems by integrating Eastern perspectives, particularly the spiritual dimension of the Indian subcontinent, with rational Western approaches. Guided by the principle of 'ahimsa' (non-violence), we support vulnerable groups and promote holistic understanding.



Euro-Atlantic Center is an independent Slovak non-governmental organisation bringing together young professionals and students in the field of international relations, foreign policy and security.



Institute for Public Affairs is an independent non-governmental, nonprofit organization bringing together experts from many different areas of study with the aim of promoting the values of an open society and a democratic political culture in public policy and decision-making.



Adapt Institute is a non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit, analytical think-tank that works on defence and security policy, with a specific focus on strategic adaptations and changes in the security environment.



Confident Slovakia (Sebavedomé Slovensko) is a 26,000-strong social media community whose members believe it's possible to be proud patriots without fear and hatred. Slovakia is a country of good

and smart people who know their history and know how to determine their future as part of the democratic world and international institutions.



Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica was established in 1995 as one of the important academic institutions that prepares experts in the field of international relations, public policy and state administration.



Open Academy's mission is to bring the reality of work into schools. We believe that if we are to have a better country, we need to support young people and connect them with employers. Standing behind Open Academy, **Otvorená Hra** is a consulting and training company, develops people in companies on the topics of authenticity, self-management and leadership.

The event is funded by the European Parliament. The European Parliament assumes no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use.