



President of the Republic of Slovenia

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**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia
Nataša Pirc Musar at 18th Bled Strategic Forum**

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Dear Excellencies,
dear President of the Hellenic Republic Katerina Sakellariopoulou,
dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to see that so many of you have decided to join the Bled Strategic Forum, which year after year brings together leaders from the governmental sector and civil society who have the knowledge, passion and commitment to influence international affairs. To all of you coming from abroad, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Slovenia and thank you for supporting the Forum and its goals.

This year's Forum, like any other similar event in the world, may have a very specific title, but essentially the title revolves around a single global question: how to avoid war and preserve peace.

The longer I serve as the President of Slovenia, the more I realise that this is the wrong question to ask. Because when it comes to peace, there should be no question at all. Peace should have been the normal state of affairs. Unfortunately, it seems that wars are. Peace must become a constant in any society that wants to call itself a civilization.

I do not deny that power matters, but I do believe that power and its sources must be thoroughly explored. I argue that the display of power is only the surface of much deeper and more complex relationships between people and ultimately between nations. It is how we *understand* power and how we *use* it matters.

I therefore propose that we talk about the *knowledge of power*. More specifically, we need to discuss a different, relatively simple question here at the Bled Strategic Forum and elsewhere: What keeps us apart and what brings us together? That is the real challenge of managing power.

Take, for example, the **power of trust**, which was the central theme of one of the previous editions of the Forum. It almost seems as if there is no such power left anymore that could keep us together. We do not trust each other. Social media were not invented to disconnect us. But that's exactly what they do. We study the intentions of other people, of other countries, often assuming the worst. We do not believe that their intentions are sincere. As a lawyer, I can confirm that, yes, the law can facilitate social progress to some extent. It can bring us together. Social media, for example, should be subject to regulation. But trust, ladies and gentlemen, cannot be regulated by law. It cannot be enshrined in a constitution or in an international convention. By losing trust, we attack the very foundations of an organised society.

Or take the **power of solidarity**. Solidarity is an important theme of this year's Forum. But when I look around and see where the world is going, I keep asking myself: what happened to that power? About a century ago, Europeans experienced indescribable violence, unemployment, poverty, hunger and deadly diseases. They experienced two world wars. Now, when many Europeans are doing well, we give back too little. In Europe alone, millions of people live below the poverty line. Solidarity was supposed to bring us together. The lack of it keeps us apart.

Or what about the **power of democracy**? Only people who are free and educated are informed enough to choose their way of life. They are likely to be more innovative and contribute to the overall strength of their society. They will be able to interact much more easily with friends and colleagues from different parts of the world and develop empathy for others – they will not be afraid of what awaits them at home if they are too critical of their governments. Sadly, not everywhere in the world, not even in Europe, is democracy fully realised as a way of life. This leads to disillusionment and eventually to an exodus of the youngest and most active members of our societies. They migrate from environments with less democracy or prosperity and more corruption to places where they can realise their aspirations and live in dignity.

Another, more sinister, aspect of the power of democracy is the danger of its abuse. And this is something that has become alarmingly easy and widespread with the tools brought about by the fourth industrial revolution. Disinformation, privacy concerns, micro-targeting of voters or consumers without their knowledge and consent are just some of the issues that are only going to get worse as technology continues to advance.

And this is why the **power of science** should never be underestimated. We can and must trust science. But only if scientists are trustworthy too. This prerequisite is crucial in the age of artificial intelligence. We need good global regulation to manage this power. The Secretary-General of the United Nations agrees: he has backed a proposal for the creation of an international AI watchdog body, similar to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Humility and modesty, ladies and gentlemen, is the next power I wish to address. For centuries, the value of our civilization has not been "less is more", but profit, translated into the term "economic growth". We live under the illusion that our economies will grow forever. We should rather strive for less but better. Every step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals means a step away from the extinction of humanity.

Nowhere, literally nowhere, is our lack of power to manage power more visible than in our countries' confrontation with a truly mighty power: **the power of nature**. Just recently, we have experienced that power in Slovenia. The devastating floods in my country.

[.....]

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, I have always hoped that the brute force of nature would spare Slovenia. Now I hope to the bottom of my heart that the mighty force of nature will spare your countries and the lives of your loved ones.

Solidarity was and is the key for all of us in such circumstances. Many countries represented at the Forum helped Slovenia. I thank you all. Hvala vsem. Slovenia will always help you as well.

What has happened here is a stark reminder of what scientists have been warning us for decades. We have lost many battles against climate change already. But there is still much we can do to adapt to climate change and do all we can to stop raising the Earth's temperature. I hope that we, humanity, will finally come to accept this reality everywhere in the world. In practice, resources should be put where they need to be put, not just in theory and in political declarations.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. We are about to dive into a mesmerising night of music with our special guests and this wonderful young composer and his orchestra here behind me. I am most confident that this will be more than just another concert, but rather a celebration of the *Forum's creative legacy*. A legacy which over all these years has shown how music, visuals and art in general can often reach where diplomacy, economics and "hard power" cannot. I wish you an inspiring evening and a pleasant stay in Bled.