

International Conference "Building Bridges Across Languages: Human-Centered AI for the Euro-Med International Conference" Evening reception

Mestni muzej Ljubljana, 6. 6. 2024

Your Royal Highness princess Rym Ali,
DG for potential Affairs Mrs Mateja Norčič Štamcar
Ambassador Veronika Stabej, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia,

Excellencies, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to welcome you tonight at this beautiful setting in the Ljubljana City Museum.

I hope you had a fruitful first day of the Conference: Building Bridges Across Languages: Human-Centered AI for the Euro-Med International Conference." Knowing that this is not the first successful event of this kind organized in cooperation of the Anna Lindh Foundation and Slovenia, I am sure that some bridges were built or at least foundations laid.

Slovenia is on crossroads from east to west of Europe and from north to south. News, ideas, innovations and commodities have been passing through here since ever, from tin and amber thousands of years ago to ideas of religious reforms. Armies in the unlucky times, railways in more fortunate ones. It belongs to Mediterranean, Central European and Alpine world. It is also the westernmost part of the Slavic speaking world, bordering on German, Romance and Ugro-Finnic. Starting as an existential need to preserve the nation for 1500 years, Ljubljana and Slovenia are now conscious promoters of intercultural dialogue fostering mutual understanding and cultural diversity.

Intercultural dialogue remains a universal and urgent need. It is the most important guarantee of understanding, integration and progress. The situation in the region and beyond calls for dialogue more seriously than ever before. It needs to be constructive and inclusive in its ambition to contribute to building the culture of peace. Our shared Mediterranean identity is closely linked and intertwined with culture. However, this culture is not understood as something bindingly unified, but as a set of different influences that enrich and complement each other.

Those processes of exchange have been working hardly visibly for hundreds of years. Take the cuisine, for example. The Italian was decisively enriched by the middle eastern 800 years ago. French court cuisine as the basis for haute cuisine today started with Catharina de Medici bringing her Italian cook to Paris when she became the queen of France. The layers of baklava became layers of millefoglie in southern Italy, being known as Napolitan cake in the north and eventually became Tort Napoleon in Russia, distorting the name but not the taste.

The words travelled even faster. New means of communication, translation and text creation offer new approaches and possibilities, but also bring new challenges. There is certain universality to it. We see and read the same news on all the shores of the Mediterranean at the same moment and to large extent in the same language. It is therefore all the more important that this is an open process of exchange that ultimately determines one's value system while preserving our respective cultural heritage, including our languages.

The Israeli author Yuval Harari warns that artificial intelligence has already hijacked language. It learns itself and creates stories that are not based on personal experience. How will we experience stories created in this way in the future, especially if they are described as reality but are based on lies, bias, manipulated reality?

Artificial Intelligence might be a game changer, but it should be considered a tool for our creativity, not a replacement for our decision making. It has no inherent and unavoidable values. As my wife the President often says, Artificial Intelligence is as ethical as its developers.

I welcome that participants of the conference will address the potential as well as the challenges it brings, including ethical aspects and the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I wish you all to succeed in contributing to translation policy and practice by sharing knowledge and developing strategies to bring humans and AI together to benefit intercultural dialogue and to create more connected and inclusive regional community in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Thank you Anna Lindh Foundation, thank you the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and thank you all for your attention.

I invite you to enjoy a beautiful evening of exchanging words and sharing ideas.