



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Speech by the President of the Republic, Nataša Pirc Musar,
on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Bled Strategic Forum**

1st of September 2025, Bled

Excellencies,
distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 20th Bled Strategic Forum. Two years ago, I had the privilege of watching a retrospective of past Forum editions. Apparently, some members of the organising team secretly shed tears of pride. I would say, rightly so! It is hard to comprehend the amount of time and energy that goes into making these events a success. So, to all the BSF teams over the years: thank you!

Much has changed in the last two decades. The glory days are over for our continent: Europe is no longer the global political and economic heavyweight. Nevertheless, countries across the world, big and small, want Europe as a reliable partner. A strong Europe, they say, can be an ally of those unwilling to be dependent on, or commanded by, the great powers.

It is an honour to see the rest of the world wanting Europe to remain a vital player in international relations. However, we risk the opposite by giving in to politicians and political parties who prefer a weaker, less interconnected and less inclusive Europe. They believe bilateralism dwarfs multilateralism. They reject the very values on which European integration rests. Today, it is therefore more important than ever to discuss these values – the values that make us human.

It frightens me to say this, but I must: 25 years ago, the European Union adopted the slogan "United in diversity". Yet today, I fear we are not even close to making this commitment a reality.

Instead of unity, we drift towards disunity. Is this how we wish to cooperate with – and compete against – the great powers? I hope not. I hope Europe will become a respected player on the international world stage. I hope that geopolitical decisions affecting Europe are not – and will not be – made without Europe. And I hope Europe continues to stand firmly behind the central premise of the epilogue to the war of aggression against Ukraine: that no decisions about Ukraine's future are made without Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Europe will only be competitive if we learn to set aside our differences and self-interests for the success of the Union and all its citizens. This will only be possible if we believe in Europe as an economic and political project that everyone understands and supports. In such a Europe, we will not question

democracy as a way of life; we will take the single market seriously; we will care for the poor, the elderly and the vulnerable; and we will know how to fight for our interests as Europeans.

Then there is diversity. There can be no respect for diversity without basic human rights. That, however, is not the case: 70 years after the integration began, and 35 years since the Cold War ended, scepticism about human rights is spreading. Xenophobia and intolerance towards those who are different or think differently are major challenges. So are the denial of women's rights, marginalisation of minorities, scapegoating of migrants, and – alarmingly – support of genocidal and apartheid policies. Excellencies, esteemed guests,

Only 80 years have passed since the end of the Second World War. Only 80 years. And we already seem to have forgotten how vital human rights and dignity are for civilisation and social progress. So deep is this collective amnesia that even the prevention of genocide – the most abhorrent crime against humanity – no longer carries the urgency it once did. I am not here to compare the dehumanisation of millions under Nazism and fascism, leading to the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity. Far from it. But I must say this: the world condemned the Srebrenica genocide and brought its perpetrators to justice. Why then, only three decades later, do some politicians tolerate, even defend, the Israel's genocidal policy against Palestinians in Gaza?

The international community resoundingly condemned Hamas's terrorist attack in October 2023. How come we have no such consensus when it comes to people living in Gaza? How can it be that there are still politicians, including in EU member states, who tolerate that most people in Gaza have been displaced multiple times? That more than 90% of homes are damaged or destroyed? How can they accept acute shortages of food, water, fuel, medicine and shelter? Or reports of Israel negotiating with South Sudan to transfer people from one war-torn land at risk of famine to another? Or the fact that humanitarian workers and doctors themselves are starving while trying to help those in need? How can they not be moved after the news hit the world that the Gaza City and surrounding areas are now officially under famine?

Distinguished guests, these are not rhetorical questions. As human beings, we must ensure that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank never fade from the political spotlight, for several reasons.

Firstly, because through our dealings with Gaza, we reveal who we are. Gaza has become a symbol of our attitude towards atrocities worldwide. If we cannot address Gaza, what legitimacy do we have to confront gross violations of human rights anywhere else?

Secondly, because our handling of Gaza reflects our understanding of humanity. When Europe advocates human rights as universal values, do we truly mean it or are they merely a tool for dominating political discourse?

Thirdly, because humanity is indivisible. We are rightly united in strongly condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine. We stand with the Ukrainian people and support the principle of territorial integrity. We cannot allow a country to seize another country's territory just because it can. We cannot allow people to be killed merely for defending their country against an aggressor. In Ukraine, we defend international law and – humanity. Values and norms are values and norms. Everywhere. For everyone. Also in Gaza.

Fourthly, because Europe needs to show unity in defending humanity. The EU's ultimate response to Israel's actions in Gaza will show the world how our leaders see Europe's future – whether democracy, unity, diversity and trust in international law remain at the centre of the European integration.

[...] That being said, I find little cause for optimism. Attacks on democracy and fundamental freedoms are visible everywhere. Many of us grew up with leaders criticising autocracies during the Cold War. Several of those regimes endure, and their practises are spreading – regrettably, even in Europe. Freedom of thought, academic freedom and investigative journalism once shaped democratic discourse. Not anymore. This is wrong. Historically wrong. Without freedom of thought, there can be no progress. Attempts to restrict free speech are always met with resistance. Those who suppress freedom of thought and critical thinking always end up on the scrapheap of history.

With this in mind, I would like to express my support for the initiative to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the West Bank and Gaza, and to the doctors caring for the people of Gaza. They deserve recognition for risking their lives to restore peace and uphold humanity. They embody what multilateralism for human rights also means: preventing individual politicians from acting with impunity.

Dear friends,

We cannot stand by and watch history unfold without us. We must not let cold pragmatism drain the soul from Europe. Now is the time to speak truth – bold, unwavering truth – to power. To bring the “United in diversity” back to the very heart of the European dream, in an enlarged EU.

Human rights and human dignity flourish in a world that is stable and just. But it is in times of crisis and uncertainty that the true test begins: the test of our courage, our conviction, our willingness to stand firm and defend our values. Now is the time to raise our voices – not in whispers of compromise, but in a thunder of determination. Let us reject those who bend their values to the winds of profit and personal gain. Let us fight for a Europe that speaks out – loudly – through every multilateral forum. Against injustice and exclusion. Against every crime against humanity. And for every silenced voice. As leaders, we shape the future – a path toward democracy, prosperity and peace, or a spiral into fear, crisis and war. This is our moment to choose the side of history we will stand on. Billions depend on our choice.

We Slovenians believe in justice, and we have no doubt: we stand firmly and proudly on the side of humanity.

Thank you.