

**Academy of Sciences for Sustainable Development of Slovenia**

## **Symposium**

# **The European Union at a Crossroads: Strategic Autonomy, Wars, and the Future of Multilateralism**

FDV, Grand Hall, March 18, 2026

**Organizers:** Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, in cooperation with the Club of Former Slovenian Ambassadors and the Slovenian Association for International Relations.

### **1. Program of the Symposium**

**8:30 – 9:00** Registration of participants

**9:00 – 9:20** Opening and introductory speeches

- Dr. Rado Bohinc, Academy of Sciences for Sustainable Development of Slovenia
- Dr. Samo Uhan, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
- Mag. Marjan Šetinc, Slovenian Association for International Relations
- Ivo Vajgl, Club of Former Slovenian Ambassadors

**9:20 – 9:35** Keynote speech

- Dr. Danilo Türk, former President of the Republic of Slovenia and founding member of AZTRS: *The European Union and the Future of the International Order 80 Years after the Founding of the UN*

#### **PANEL I (9:35 – 10:50)**

#### **80 Years of the UN: Reform of Multilateralism, International Law, and the Normative Power of the EU**

Moderator: Dr. Boštjan Udovič

Participants: Dr. Rudi Rizman, Dr. Matjaž Nahtigal, Dr. Milan Brglez, Dr. Mitja Žagar

Thematic highlights:

- Crisis and reform of the UN system
- Reconstruction of international law
- The EU's role in strengthening multilateral institutions
- Normative power of the EU and human rights
- Conditions for peaceful coexistence
- Democracy and sustainable development

**Break (10:50 – 11:10)**

**PANEL II (11:10 – 12:25)**

**The EU Amid Global Rivalries: Geoeconomics, Trade, and Strategic Autonomy**

Moderator: Dr. Marjan Svetličič

Participants: Dr. Bogomir Kovač, Mag. Sibil Svilan, Dr. Andreja Jaklič, Peter Grk, Mag. Gorazd Hladnik

Thematic highlights:

- The EU in a world of great powers and trade blocs
- MERCOSUR, India, and relations with China
- Trade imbalances and technological dependence
- Strategic autonomy and industrial policy
- Green transition and competitiveness
- Energy security
- EU enlargement as a geopolitical instrument

**Reception (12:25 – 13:00)**

**PANEL III (13:00 – 14:15)**

**Wars and the Future of European Security**

Moderator: Dr. Jelena Juvan

Participants: Dr. Sabina Lange, Dr. Uroš Lipušček, Dr. Faris Kočan, Branko Soban

Thematic highlights:

- Scenarios for the resolution of the war in Ukraine
- The EU as a (non-)direct actor in negotiations
- Transatlantic relations and strategic autonomy
- EU defense integration
- Energy and infrastructure security
- Internal political stability of the EU
- Reconstruction of Ukraine and EU enlargement

**14:15 – 14:30** Closing reflection and recommendations

Summary of key highlights: Dr. Rado Bohinc, Dr. Matjaž Nahtigal

# **Stances of the Presidency of the Academy of Sciences for Sustainable Development of Slovenia (AZTRS)**

## **The European Union at a Crossroads: The Future of Multilateralism, Strategic Autonomy, Wars**

### **1. Multilateralism, international law, and the universality of human rights are an irreplaceable foundation of the international order.**

- The UN Charter, international law, and universal human rights remain the key framework for maintaining peace and stability. Respect for these principles must be universal and non-selective, not conditioned by political alliances or geopolitical interests.
- Double standards undermine the legitimacy of the international system and the credibility of democratic states.
- A thorough reform of the UN is needed, particularly to limit veto deadlocks in the Security Council.
- The EU must strengthen its own credibility in consistently respecting international law and actively support the institutions it helped create.

### **2. Current wars are a threat to international peace and require clear political responsibility.**

- The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East (Gaza, Lebanon, the Iran-US-Israel conflict) pose major challenges to European and global security, with serious risks of wider regional escalation.
- These conflicts reveal deeper civilizational tensions that cannot be resolved solely by existing institutional mechanisms.
- The EU must unequivocally condemn aggression and consistently defend international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians, respect for the Geneva Conventions, and efforts for a just and lasting peace must apply equally to all conflicts, without double standards.
- The EU must take a more active and independent role in seeking political solutions, including dialogue with all key actors.

### **3. Authoritarian and illiberal political models are a systemic threat to democracy and the international order.**

- Systems that maintain formal democratic procedures while undermining the rule of law, limiting media freedom, and criminalizing civil society are spreading.
- These processes not only threaten internal democratic stability but also normalize power politics and erode trust in rules.
- The EU must resolutely defend democratic standards, institutional independence, and fundamental freedoms both within its borders and internationally. The spread of illiberal practices in the European space requires a decisive and coordinated response.

### **4. The European Union must become a serious and sovereign geopolitical actor.**

- The world is rapidly becoming an arena of great-power rivalry. The EU cannot afford political fragmentation and strategic indecision.
- The EU must strengthen its strategic autonomy in security, energy, technology, industrial policy, and supply chain resilience, requiring institutional and political reforms for more effective decision-making in foreign and security policy.
- Multipolarity is already a reality, but a new balance of power has not yet been established, increasing instability.
- The EU lags in digital sovereignty and technological capabilities. Its competitiveness model must be based on high social, environmental, and ethical standards and sustainable development.
- Strengthening soft power, a culture of peace, and the social model remains a key comparative advantage. The EU should actively contribute to a new global agreement on the peaceful coexistence of cultures and civilizations.

## **5. Democracy requires active defense of institutions, freedoms, and social cohesion.**

- Democracy does not collapse suddenly but gradually – through the relativization of human rights, discrediting of independent institutions, attacks on free media, and limiting civil society space.
- It is necessary to actively defend the rule of law, institutional independence, academic freedom, media freedom, and a plural civil society.
- Democracy is not merely an institutional framework but a social project based on political responsibility, social justice, and active citizenship.
- The erosion of democracy is spreading transnationally, requiring a common and decisive European response.

## **Conclusion**

Eighty years after the founding of the UN, it is clear that peace, democracy, and respect for international law are not self-evident. Restoring a stable and just international order requires simultaneous strengthening of multilateral institutions, reform of the UN, and the political empowerment of the EU as a global actor. It also requires a new global agreement on the peaceful coexistence of cultures and civilizations. Protecting international law and civilians is a matter of historical responsibility. Slovenia, with its foreign policy based on international law, multilateralism, and human rights, can actively contribute to these efforts.

<https://aztrs.org/>