



**Monday, October 26, 2026**  
**Ballroom, Sofia Balkan Palace**

## **08.30 Arrival of Guests - Registration**

## **09.10 Welcome Remarks**

- ✓ **Symeon G. Tsomokos**, Delphi Economic Forum, Greece

## **09.15 Opening Session**

- ✓ **H.E. Rumen Radev**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

## **09.45 European Unity at a Crossroads: Nationalism vs. a Common Strategy**

*With major European elections on the horizon in 2027, the debate over national interests versus collective EU foreign and security policy is intensifying. This panel will address whether the EU should re-evaluate its approach to member states to counter rising nationalism and strengthen European cohesion.*

- ✓ **Rosen Plevneliev**, President of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2017)
- ✓ **Sergei Stanishev**, Prime Minister of Bulgaria (2005-2009); Member of the European Parliament
- ✓ **H.E. Andrea Ikit-Böhm**, Ambassador of Austria to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **H.E. Marie Dumoulin**, Ambassador of France to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Vessela Tcherneva**, Deputy Director, ECFR
  
- ✓ *Chair: Nik Gowing*, Co-Director, Thinking the Unthinkable, UK

## **10.35 In Conversation**

- ✓ **Maka Botchorishvili**, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Georgia
- ✓ **Velislava Petrova-Chamova**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Bulgaria
  
- ✓ *Chair: Konstantin Valkov*, Director Special Projects and Lecturer, New Bulgarian University



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## 11.05 Keynote statement

- ✓ **Ivan Vasilev**, Minister of Innovation and Digital Transformation, Republic of Bulgaria

## 11.15 Global Realignments: A Threat or an Opportunity?

*In an era of permanent crises, the international order is being tested by the forever wars, alongside intensifying strategic competition between the world's major powers. This volatility has significantly complicated the conduct of foreign policy, forcing nations to navigate a landscape where traditional alliances are shifting and long-standing diplomatic norms are under strain. This high-level discussion will explore how states can formulate effective foreign policy to protect their sovereign interests amid these global realignments. Is this a moment of unprecedented threat, or does it present a strategic opportunity for agile nations to enhance their influence and forge new partnerships?*

- ✓ **H.E. Inid Milo**, Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Simona Leskovar**, Ambassador; Programme Director, Bled Strategic Forum, Ministry of Foreign & European Affairs, Slovenia
- ✓ **H.E. Arun Kumar Sahu**, Ambassador of India to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Chair: Konstantin Valkov**, Director Special Projects and Lecturer, New Bulgarian University

## 11.45 Keynote statement

- ✓ **H.E. Despina Koukoulopoulou**, Ambassador-designate of the Hellenic Republic to the Republic of Bulgaria

## 12.00 A New Chapter in Transatlantic Relations: U.S. Engagement in the Black Sea

*Following the recent agreement for the stationing of U.S. tanker aircraft despite external warnings, this panel will explore the evolving strategic partnership between Bulgaria and the United States. Experts will discuss the implications for regional security, NATO's eastern flank, and how this collaboration positions Bulgaria within the broader geopolitical landscape.*

- ✓ **Hristo Alexiev**, Secretary on Economy of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **H.E. Brandusa Ioana Predescu**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **H.E. Beata Daszyńska-Muzyczka**, Presidential Amb. for the Three Seas Initiative (2023–2025), President, TSBC
- ✓ **Ivan Mihaylov**, CEO, American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria
- ✓ **Solomon Passy**, Founding President, Atlantic Club of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Chair: Elena Poptodorova**, Vice President and Founding Member of the Board, Atlantic Club of Bulgaria

12.40

## Networking break

## 12.55 Fireside Chat

- ✓ **Atanas Pekanov**, Deputy Prime Minister, Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Chair: Nik Gowing**, Co-Director, Thinking the Unthinkable, UK

✓ *confirmed speaker*

*Working languages: Bulgarian & English  
(with simultaneous translation)*



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### **13.15 The First Year of the Euro in Bulgaria: Early Impacts and Future Prospects**

*Having officially adopted the single currency, Bulgaria is navigating its first year fully integrated into the Eurozone core. This panel will analyze the initial economic impacts of this milestone, the opportunities it presents for trade, how it can attract high-value Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and the steps needed to boost the country's overall economic competitiveness in the single market.*

- ✓ **H.E. Irene Maria Plank**, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Panos Mavridis**, Chairman, Hellenic Business Council in Bulgaria; COO, Eurobank Bulgaria AD (Postbank)
- ✓ *Chair:* **Petar Ganev**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Market Economics (IME)

### **13.35 The PPP model: Paving the Way for Inclusive Growth**

*This session will explore the role of Public-Private Partnerships in accelerating development in Bulgaria and Southeast Europe. The panelists will discuss best practices for attracting private investment and how PPPs can be effectively used to boost innovation and long-term economic growth.*

- ✓ **Nikos Sergis**, Head of PPP Unit, Ministry of National Economy & Finance, Hellenic Republic
- ✓ **Jesus Caballero**, CEO, SOF Connect
- ✓ **Spyros Venetsianos**, Head of Structured Finance, General Manager, Eurobank, Greece
- ✓ **Maria Tzanidaki**, Principal Manager, Head of the Greek PPP Preparation Facility, EBRD
- ✓ *Chair:* **Boyan Rashev**, Founder, Mind Your Future

**14.15**

### **Networking Lunch Break**

### **15.00 The Demographic Dilemma: Addressing Population Decline in Bulgaria and Europe**

*Bulgaria and many other European nations are facing a severe demographic crisis characterized by aging populations and declining birth rates. This session will explore the socio-economic impacts of this trend and discuss potential strategies and policy interventions to mitigate its long-term consequences on the workforce, social security systems, and economic growth.*

- ✓ **Themis Christophidou**, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission
- ✓ **Assen Vassilev**, MP, We Continue the Change; Minister of Finance (2023-2024), Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Nikola Dimitrov**, President, Balkan Center for Constructive Policies – SOLUTION
- ✓ **Jason Brett Pellmar**, Country Manager for Bulgaria, World Bank Group
- ✓ *Chair:* **Athanasios Katsikidis**, Freelance Columnist, Kathimerini



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### **15.50 Energy Resilience: Nuclear Power Stability and the Vertical Gas Corridor**

*While extreme heatwaves and historic low water levels in the Danube threaten regional power generation in neighboring countries, Bulgaria's nuclear plant stands as a pillar of operational resilience. This panel will address the ongoing need to maintain regional grid stability, balance the green transition, and highlight the strategic importance of the Vertical Gas Corridor in ensuring energy security and supply diversification across Southeast Europe.*

- ✓ **Iva Petrova**, Minister of Energy, Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Kalin Peshov**, Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy
- ✓ **Kiril Ravnachki**, CEO, Bulgartransgaz
- ✓ **Bogomil Manchev**, Chairman of the BoD, Bulgarian Atomic Forum
- ✓ **Sabrina Schulz**, Germany Director, European Initiative for Energy Security
- ✓ **Mark Rachovides**, President Emeritus, Euromines, Belgium
- ✓ *Chair:* **Konstantin Valkov**, Director Special Projects and Lecturer, New Bulgarian University

### **16.50 The AI Transformation: Driving Productivity and Economic Competitiveness**

*Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming industries, redefining operational efficiency, and reshaping the global economic landscape. This panel will explore how businesses and economies in Southeast Europe can leverage AI technologies to drive innovation, optimize productivity, and unlock new growth potential. Discussions will focus on the integration of AI in traditional sectors, the critical need for workforce upskilling, and how embracing this technological shift is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in global markets.*

- ✓ **Vasil Terziev**, Mayor of Sofia
- ✓ **Denys Strobykin**, General Manager, Philip Morris Bulgaria
- ✓ **Simon Jenner**, Managing Director, Sodalis Space
- ✓ **Tsvetan Simeonov**, President, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- ✓ **Antoine-Raphael J. Doummar**, Chief Innovation Officer, DOUMMAR MEP Contracting
- ✓ *Chair:* **Pavlos Efthymiou**, General Manager, Hellenic Association of Entrepreneurs (EENE), Greece



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#### **17.40 Hardwiring the Region: Strategic Infrastructure and Connectivity in Southeast Europe**

*Developing robust and modern infrastructure is critical for the economic integration and long-term competitiveness of Southeast Europe. This panel will explore the expansion and modernization of regional transport networks, including key rail, road, and logistics connections. Stakeholders and experts will discuss the challenges of funding large-scale projects, accelerating cross-border cooperation, and building resilient infrastructure that can support sustainable economic development and stronger regional cohesion.*

- ✓ **Georgi Peev**, Minister of Transport and Communications, Republic of Bulgaria
- ✓ **Lilyana Pavlova**, Vice President of the European Investment Bank (2019–2023)
- ✓ **Plamen Panchov**, CEO, Trakia Economic Zone
- ✓ **Savvas Karafyllidis**, President & Founder, Bulgarian-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- ✓ *Chair:* **George Kremlis**, Ambassador of the European Public Law Organisation to Bulgaria

#### **18.20 Circular Economy as the New Economic Driver**

*Transitioning to a circular economy is essential for building sustainable and resilient societies. This panel will explore the broader shift from traditional economic models towards resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable production. Discussions will focus on how businesses and governments can collaborate to integrate sustainable practices, foster green innovation, and unlock new economic opportunities while minimizing environmental impact.*

- ✓ **Nikolay Bankov**, CEO, Kronospan
- ✓ **George Efstratiadis**, Managing Director, IDATOR, Greece
- ✓ **Roberto Santorelli**, President & CEO, Santorelli AD
- ✓ **Gabriella Kirova**, Founder, Institute for Strategic Thinking, Bulgaria
- ✓ **Svetlin Pislenski**, Senior Banker & Associate Director, Sofia Resident Office, EBRD
- ✓ *Chair:* **George Kremlis**, Ambassador of the European Public Law Organisation to Bulgaria

#### **19.10 End of Forum**