



Balkan SAYS 2026

10 – 12 September 2026
Ljubljana, Slovenia

PROGRAMME



PROGRAMME

Thursday, 10 September 2026

09:00–12:30 **Registration of participants**

13:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

- **Matic Kosirnik**, President of YATA Slovenia and Project Lead of Balkan SAYS 2026
 - **Prof. Dr Iztok Prezelj**, President of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia
 - **Ambassador Matjaž Longar**, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia
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13:30 **Keynote Speech – What Comes Next?**

The Future of Euro-Atlantic Security in an Era of Strategic Uncertainty

- **Ambassador Dr Andrej Benedejčič**, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO
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14:00 **Coffee Break**

14:30–16:00 **Panel I – A Return to Power Politics?**

Europe's Security Order in a World Beyond Norms and Predictability

- **Dr Erik Kopač**, State Secretary, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia; former Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO
 - **Colonel (Ret.) Tucker Mansager**, Political Adviser to the Commander, Allied LANDCOM; former Executive Officer, NATO Executive Management Division
 - **Mr Bruce Bach**, Senior International Security Policy Analyst, RAND Corporation; former Force Planner, NATO Defence Policy and Planning Division
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- **Dr Denis Mancevič**, Strategic Adviser, Senior Analyst and Columnist; former Economic Adviser, Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Moscow

Moderator: Ms Katarina Ahčin, YATA Slovenia

16:15–17:15	Workshop I – Decision-making Below Article 5: Managing Grey-Zone Pressure on NATO's Eastern Flank
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19:00	Dinner
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Friday, 11 September 2026

09:00–9:30	Registration of participants
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9:30–11:00	Panel II – From Pledges to Capability: Are We Delivering on Defence Commitments?
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- **Mr Mateo Osterhagen-Zalles**, Deputy Director, Defence Planning Directorate, NATO Defence Policy and Planning Division
- **Mr Uroš Lampret**, Defence Adviser, Permanent Delegation of Slovenia to NATO; former State Secretary at the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia and Head of the Defence Department at the Permanent Delegation of Slovenia to the EU
- **Mr Boštjan Skalar**, Director, Slovenian Defence Industry Cluster

Moderator: Ms Maša Omahen, YATA Slovenia

11:00	Coffee Break
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11:30–12:30	Workshop II – Managing a Security Crisis in the Western Balkans
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12:30	Lunch Break
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14:00–14:45

One-on-One Discussion – The Future of Diplomacy in an Evolving and Fragmented World Order

- **Prof. Dr Dimitrij Rupel**, Slovenia's first Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving across several terms; former Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the United States

Moderator: Mr Joshua W. Moolman, YATA Slovenia

14:45

Coffee Break

15:15–16:45

Panel III – The Western Balkans as a Security Stress Test: EU Enlargement Credibility and Regional Stability

- **Ambassador Damjan Bergant**, Foreign Policy Adviser to the President of the Republic of Slovenia; former Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to Serbia
- **Ms Sanja Radulović**, First Counsellor, Embassy of Montenegro in the Republic of Slovenia
- **Prof. Dr Dejan Jović**, Professor of International Relations and Security Studies, University of Zagreb; Chair of the Board, Foreign Policy Forum; former Chief Political Analyst in the Office of the President of Croatia
- **Mr Boštjan Anžin**, Head of News Programme Integration, RTV Slovenija; former Balkan Correspondent and Bureau Chief

Moderator: Ms Azra Kerić, YATA Slovenia

20:00

SAYS NIGHT 2026

Networking reception and dinner at Ljubljana Nebotičnik/Skyscraper

Saturday, 12 September 2026

09:00–09:30 **Registration of participants**

09:30–11:00 **Panel IV – Are We Resilient Enough? Hybrid Threats and External Influence in the Euro-Atlantic Space**

- **Ambassador Vladimir Vučinić**, Head of the NATO Political Engagement Support Cell (PESC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina; former Director General for NATO and Security Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro
- **Ms Katja Geršak**, Head of the Trivelis Institute for Defence, Security and Resilience; Co-Founder, Regional Dialogue
- **Dr Uroš Svete**, Associate Professor, University of Ljubljana; former Director of the Government Information Security Office of the Republic of Slovenia
- **Mr Igor Zidarič**, Secretary General, Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia

Moderator: Ms Tara Miler, YATA Slovenia

11:00 **Coffee Break**

11:30–12:15 **One-on-One Discussion – Europe's Strategic Role in the Western Balkans in a Changing World Order**

- **Mr Borut Pahor**, former President of the Republic of Slovenia; Founder and Director of the Friends of the Western Balkans Institute

Moderator: Ms Miriam Medved, YATA Slovenia

12:15–12:45 **Closing Session and Presentation of Certificates**

13:00 **End of Balkan SAYS 2026**
