

Moment of Truth Reflections for the Future

A European Forum Alpbach Book

Anthology of Scholarship Holders' Reflections
of 2024

Initiated, supported and edited by
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All articles are the unfiltered opinion of the scholarship holders and does not reflect the EFA's opinions to certain topics.

The content of this book shall be widely spread.

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FOREWORD

Only those who have a vision of our future can shape it. The European Forum Alpbach is a place where ideas flourish, and individuals are invited to step into their power to become changemakers for the benefit of all.

The European Forum Alpbach is rooted in the belief that every individual has the potential to create a significant impact. We see this potential come to life through the vibrant discussions, projects, and networks forming our gatherings' fabric. The European Forum Alpbach is more than an event; it is a platform that nurtures thousands of participants' creativity and implementation power annually. By design, it must be intergenerational, diverse, and inclusive.

This is why we invite leaders like Martin Giesswein, who initiated and co-edited this book, to co-create concrete, tangible experiences for the Forum. Experiences that are designed to harness the creativity and implementation power of our many participants to amplify their agency and contribution to Europe and the world. For the first time in 2024, through this book, we invited the 500 young people who come to the Forum on a scholarship to describe their desired futures. This was made possible through the leadership of our “Creative Writing” seminar chairs and co-editors of this book Lucy English, Charley Lane-McElroy and Cassandra McLaughlin.

This book is not just a collection of stories—it is a living testimony to the visions, dreams and thoughts of this year's scholarship holders. The book project was closely linked to another central element of this year's European Forum Alpbach, the Arts & Culture program “Inhabit the Future.” The program challenged us to expand our imagination and boldly think beyond the boundaries of what has been possible so far.

In the spirit of Ernst Bloch's concept of “Concrete Utopia,” participants were asked to develop an optimistic, long-term vision of the future. Through immersive artistic interventions in the form of an “election campaign”—with posters, voting booths, political rallies, slogans, manifestos, discussions, and performances—a collective imagination process was set in motion. This book offers a deep insight into the hearts and minds of the next generation of visionaries and creators and their “Moments of Truth.” Each story in this book is a building block for a future we want to build together.

I invite you to be inspired by the imagined futures and feel our authors' passion and commitment to Europe and the world!

Marie Ringler
Vice President of the European Forum Alpbach

EDITORS' NOTE

As long-time enthusiasts of the European Forum Alpbach, we have always envisioned a book that would capture the impressions and ideas of the vibrant community of scholarship holders. In 2024, this vision became a reality through the collaboration of dozens of passionate writers eager to share their thoughts.

Our heartfelt thanks go to these authors who shared their reflections, emotions, hopes and opinions in a variety of creative formats. During and shortly after the inspiring two weeks of the Forum Alpbach 2024, they brought this project to life. The creative writing seminar and the lunchtime writing coaching sessions became hubs of inspiration. After saying goodbye in Alpbach and scattering across the globe, we finalized the texts through our digital collaboration as if Alpbach were everywhere.

We have grouped these remarkable contributions into four categories within two sections: Stories and Essays, Poetry and Poems. The linguistic and international diversity of the submissions is equally remarkable; each contribution was welcomed in the language and format that best suited the author, always reflecting the spirit and values of the European Forum Alpbach.

Through this anthology, we hope to inspire many more talents and innovators to participate and become co-authors, not only of books like these, but of our common future. But this narrative power cannot just be straightforward and precise. Like this collection, it must offer a deeply personal and richly diverse perspective on the unique opportunities we have been given by this extraordinary place and forum.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the EFA organisation, which has supported this experimental project from day one and given us the freedom to bring it to fruition.

For any questions, suggestions, or ideas for future books, feel free to reach out to us at martin@giesswein.org.

With gratitude and anticipation, your editorial team

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Table of Contents

STORIES & ESSAYS	1
'Reflections in a Meadow' by Milica Vujačić	2
'The Power of Openness: Shaping Group Dynamics' by Joseph Krautgasser	4
'Strangers Carried by Sunbeams' by Edrine Krasniqi	7
'Finding My Voice' by Sonia Mogojan	9
'Breaking Glass' by Christina Steinhart	14
'Bosnian Coffee' by Emina Pašanović	16
'Alpine Reflections on the Demise of Liberal Peace' by Tobias Sauer	23
'How to think the Future' by Jeldrik Schottke	27
'Truth in the Machine' by Diyya Abdulkader	29
'The Alpbach Declaration: 15 Years of Europe's Renaissance' by Benjamin Frommann	31
'Is There a Place for Both of Us?' by Juraj Obrež	34
'Man in the Mirror rorrim eht ni naM' by Alexander Gstrein	36
'Looking for More Men in Finance' by Patrick Silvan Scheiwiller	39
'Just a Crush?' by Jure Ivić and Valentina Ostojić	42
'Alone: A Path to Creativity or a State of Isolation' by Renata Penchova	45
'Un tejido a 3 tiempos' by Lucía Z. Serrano Rocabado	47
'Tin foil paper ballerinas' by Marina Vanni	51
'Framing the Future' by Colas van Moorsel	54
'A Modern Grammar Lesson in Empathetic Language' by Cass McLaughlin	57
POETRY & PROSE.....	61
'Buenas Vistas' by Cass McLaughlin	62
'Wednesday' by Charley Lane-McElroy	64
'The Stream is Louder' by Lucy English	65
'The Slowest Hiker in Alpbach' by Sam Deddeh	66
'Kaffee und Kuchen im Dorf' by Lisa Settari	68
'writer' by Anna Bauer	71
'Rest' by Susanne Roberts	72
'Inspiration' by Lucy English	74
~~HumanConnectivity~~ by Cass McLaughlin & Isio Ighofose	76
'Captaining' by Lisa Settari	79
'The Last Word' by Sam Deddeh	82
'The Moment of Action' by Andrea Veselá	84
AUTHOR Biographies	88

STORIES & ESSAYS

'Reflections in a Meadow' by Milica Vujačić

As I sit on the grass, the evening sun gently warms the back of my head, and a light breeze dances through my hair. We're all seated in a circle with our eyes closed, reminiscing about the ups and downs of the past two weeks. Emotions flood my body, rushing through me with such force that I feel a tight pressure in my chest. I find solace in learning that others, too, are overwhelmed with emotion as we reflect on our experiences. The feelings inside me have no single name – they are a mix of appreciation, introspection, and solemnity all at once. Although I struggle to find the exact words to describe how I'm feeling, one thing is certain: I feel safe. Safe to express my emotions, knowing they will be met with understanding and support.

I listen to the voices around me, each illustrating nuanced perceptions of the time we spent together. It's in this moment I realize that here in the meadow of this alpine village has become my second place of safety. The first was with an entirely different group of people, in a seminar that just so happened to carry this name – "A Place of Safety".

The moment that stands out most to me occurred completely unexpectedly. It was a continuation of a name game we had played several times in the seminar. Everyone stood in a circle, tossing a tennis ball to someone while calling out their name. A simple act, but each throw created a brief moment of eye contact and shared connection. One afternoon during a break, three of us spontaneously picked up the tennis balls again, tossing them back and forth, gradually adding more until three balls were flying through the air at once. Slowly, as others returned from their break, they joined in without explanation, seamlessly becoming part of the game. No words were exchanged except for

the names we called to each other, accompanied by smiles. We continued like this, running around the room and playing, until we were all out of breath.

It wasn't just a game of throwing tennis balls. It was about finding trust in others and beyond merely oneself. It symbolized the unspoken bond we had built in just a few days, the connection that allowed us to let go, to trust each other and the situation as a whole. Though this exercise was entirely unplanned, it was the most meaningful one we experienced. It embodied the true spirit of what we had created together – a place of safety.

Another unexpectedly profound moment came during our presentation to the neighboring seminar group. Performing alongside someone I had met on my very first evening in Alpbach, the two of us moved together in an improvised routine with a powerful rapport. As we swayed to the rhythm of the music, everything around us disappeared and those watching us melted into the background. In that moment, all that existed was the connection we had built, and it was exhilarating.

How could I feel so safe with people who were complete strangers just a week ago?

Alpbach, and this seminar in particular, taught me the beauty and power of becoming part of something larger than oneself. It is when we come together, engage with our counterparts and build trust that a true place of safety emerges. A place where collaboration triumphs over competition, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We, the youth, are a wellspring of fresh ideas, inspiration and perspectives. On the future European and world stage, I wish to see youth represented in positions of power, contributing meaningfully to decision-making processes across all spheres of influence. Meaningful youth engagement must become the new norm for a better world – one where no one is left behind. It's time for young people to finally have their well-deserved seat at the table when decisions that shape our future are made.

As I sit in the meadow, gratitude washes over me. I am thankful for the experiences I've had and the memories I will carry with me.

'The Power of Openness: Shaping Group Dynamics' by Joseph Krautgasser

I'm on my way to the primary school, and it's a rainy, unseasonably cool day. I'm already late, and to make matters worse, I forgot my umbrella at my accommodation. I have a rain jacket with me, but it's doing little to shield me from the persistent rain soaking through my clothes and running down my face.

I stand outside the conference centre, letting the rain wash over me as I search for the school's location. Taking out my phone, I open the Forum Alpbach app and start looking for directions. "It can't be that hard," I think. This town is small, with only a few thousand inhabitants. The school must be nearby.

By now, the rain barely bothers me, even as my clothes grow heavier with moisture. Finding the primary school is all that matters. Despite having been at the forum for several days, I've somehow failed to get a proper sense of where things are—a mistake, in hindsight.

"What should I do?" I wonder. In just a few minutes, I'm supposed to be at the school for a seminar, yet I'm still no closer to figuring out where it is. Google Maps and the forum app are no help either. Fortunately, I spot someone heading toward the town center and ask her for directions. By luck, she's also heading to the primary school for a seminar. Relieved, I follow her and arrive just in time.

As we reach the school, we part ways—she heads to her seminar, and I go to mine. Upon entering the room, I'm greeted by a sea of unfamiliar faces, none of whom I've seen at the forum before. The same uneasy feeling I had earlier

creeps back in. Uncertainty. I'm not sure how to fit in with this new group.

Though I'm typically sociable, this situation feels different. It's a new seminar with new people, and I have no idea what to expect. I introduce myself to a few people, trying to start a conversation as the first exercise begins.

"Oh no," I think. "How's this going to work?" It's a drama seminar, part of the ARTS category, organized by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). The description promised that it would push participants out of their comfort zones and help build confidence. But can a short seminar really instill confidence?

I wonder, "What exactly is this confidence they're talking about? Will it help me through the rest of the forum? Will it help me navigate interactions and create a better experience for myself?"

At first, it's unclear where this is going. The initial exercise involves nothing more than reciting our names while making gestures. I can't help but think, "What's the point of this?" Instead of feeling confident, I'm more uncertain than ever. The seminar promises safety and confidence, but so far, I don't feel either.

As the seminar progresses, we move quickly from one exercise to the next, with brief breaks in between. Over time, I start to build a connection with the others, despite my initial hesitation. There's a growing sense of harmony and camaraderie within the group.

I ask myself, "Is this connection due to the exercises, or is it because of the way we're all behaving?" Perhaps it's both. But what's clear is the importance of being open. By participating fully and embracing the experience, I'm learning alongside everyone else. We're growing together as a group, developing a dynamic that wasn't there before.

This dynamic continues to evolve throughout the week. By the last day, it's clear how much we've progressed. The way we interact is completely different from when we started—faster, more confident, more dynamic. The group dynamic has become something special, allowing us to realize our potential.

In the beginning, performing a play seemed impossible—too uncertain, too difficult for such a new group. But by the end of the week, we performed with a self-assurance that amazed me. Drama seminars are designed to prepare you for the stage, but I never imagined they could foster such a sense of safety, harmony, and dynamism in such a short time.

By the time the seminar ends, we've become a cohesive unit, ready to take on new challenges. It's bittersweet to say goodbye to these few days filled with emotion, openness, and collaboration.

As I leave the primary school after our final performance, I reflect on the experience. I think about the exercises that brought us closer together and the progress we made as a group. I had fun, no doubt about it. But I wonder, "What will I take away from this? What will stay with me?"

At first, I can't pinpoint anything. But then I bump into friends from the seminar group. We laugh, share stories, and reflect on our time together. That's when it hits me: it's the openness and group dynamics that made all the difference. Without them, the seminar would have gone in a completely different direction.

This experience has shown me the power of openness. Being open to new things, to others, is essential—not just in drama, but in every aspect of life. Whether at school, at work, in politics, or in sports, openness helps build strong group dynamics, and that's what allows individuals—and groups—to grow. Looking back on the general theme of the Forum Alpbach 2024, I realize this was my personal moment of truth.

'Strangers Carried by Sunbeams' by Edrine Krasniqi

The sunbeams reflecting off this baroque church in Tyrol are hurting my eyes. I sit here, on this old wooden bench, waiting for the bus that will arrive in half an hour. It certainly feels short, as I am still not full of the view in front of me. I have never seen such a landscape before, and yet, here I sit yearning for more. A few minutes later, a young woman approaches the bench where I'm sitting. Her hair is a fair shade of blonde, and her expression mirrors the tiredness in her posture. She is wearing a white badge around her neck, covered with a few purple figurines, an odd detail that catches my eye. Strange, I think, as I come here often and have not seen anyone wearing such a badge before. For a moment, I fight my curiosity. Then, it wins.

"Long day?" I ask, breaking the silence.

"Very long," she answers, in a tone filled with disappointment.

Without hesitation, she begins to tell me about her day, a tale that gradually pulls me in. Certainly, I'm impressed. She tells me about the international forum she is attending, where leaders and peers from all around the world meet. Her journey to the forum was long and tiring, she had waited at the border for nineteen hours, a stretch made bearable only by the company of two other girls from her country, strangers until this trip. Together, they endured two sunsets and two sunrises before they finally arrived in Alpbach, where they would spend two weeks living together. They were off to a good start. On her second day at the forum, she continues to tell me, she took part in a seminar where they were faced with a challenge and half her group had to observe how the other half was acting during it. By the end of the observers' comments, she was quite disappointed. She felt like the people did not really pay attention to her efforts in the group. But later, in a moment of quiet reflection, she understood

something profound: in life, you are not always seen as you see yourself. People only see what you choose to show them, within the limited time they know you. For her, that realization was a turning point. From that moment on, she became more mindful of how she presented herself, aware of the many dimensions she possessed and eager to reveal them. She learned not to take others' opinions too personally, but also not to judge them for their limited understanding. How could they know her better, after all? She tells me that during the forum, she met people who became her role models—though not the high-ranking officials one might expect. Instead, it was the small encounters, the brief conversations with strangers, that resonated with her the most. A single sentence could linger in her mind, echoing with meaning. She began to see how each person she met had something unique to offer, something she could take with her, adding to her own sense of self.

The girl pauses, with a soft smile on her lips as she gazes off into the distance. "And this," she says, "is only a fraction of what I've learned so far. There's so much more, so many ideas I haven't even had time to process. It's overwhelming, but in the best way. I can't wait to see what else the forum has in store for me."

Her eyes brighten as she continues, "I want to keep absorbing and learning. There are so many perspectives I've never considered before. It is as if I'm being reshaped, little by little, by every person I meet."

For a moment, I am envious of her—her youth, her enthusiasm, the richness of the experiences she's gathering. In hearing her story, I am reminded that it is never too late to rediscover the world, to find meaning in unexpected places. As she stands to leave, her bus now in sight, she turns to me with a smile. "Thank you for listening," she says, "I didn't realize how much I needed to talk about all this."

"Thank you for sharing," I reply, and I mean it.

As she boards the bus, I watch her go, feeling a sense of peace settle over me. The sunbeam, which once seemed harsh, now feels gentle and warm, casting a golden hue over everything. I take a deep breath, feeling the cool air fill my lungs, and for the first time in a long while, I look forward to what the day might bring.

'Finding My Voice' by Sonia Mogojan

Hello! My name is Sonia Mogojan. I was 20 years old at the time of the Forum and am a scholarship holder from Romania, where I'm pursuing a degree in psychology at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj. While many might think studying psychology involves mind-reading or endless self-analysis, I often joke that understanding human behavior can be as confusing as quantum mechanics.

From a young age, I struggled with severe social anxiety. Simple tasks like buying groceries or speaking to a group felt overwhelming. My earliest memory of a panic attack dates back to elementary school, where I stood in front of the class, trying to solve a math problem, my heart racing and my mind utterly blank. Bullying only exacerbated my anxiety; I was constantly harassed for simply wanting to be listened to. Singing became another way for me to find my voice amidst the chaos.

Journaling has been a constant in my life. Over the years, I realized that my environment significantly influenced how I perceived and interacted with others. Initially, I thought I suffered from "social anxiety," but it felt more like a profound fear of people, rooted in the belief that no one would be there to support me through my challenges. Gradually, as I exposed myself to more social events, I learned that sharing my feelings didn't push people away; rather, it fostered understanding and acceptance. It was crucial for me to create a safe space within myself and to know which resources to turn to in times of need. Despite my own struggles, I have always been passionate about helping others through theirs, which is why I chose psychotherapy as my path.

A year ago, I participated in a training program on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. During one session, we discussed how to create an

environment where people feel safe to share their authentic selves without fear of judgment. When it was time for a live demonstration, I felt a wave of anxiety wash over me, but I volunteered. In that moment, I burst into tears, feeling overwhelmed by my inability to take initiative and express myself, despite my motivation to create. Instead of asking me about the roots of my feelings, the therapist encouraged me to look around the room at the supportive face, imagining how they felt when I shared my struggles. This shifted my perspective; I realized I was not alone, and the exercise became a compassionate mirror that dispelled my shame. It marked the beginning of my ability to make eye contact while speaking and fueled my hope of working comfortably in groups—a significant aspiration for someone who values human connection.

The European Forum Alpbach (EFA) provided a unique setting for this experience. I, a 20-year-old girl with anxiety, took on the challenge of participating in a speakers' night contest. I considered myself a bit crazy for even attempting it, feeling like an impostor among people with far more experience. The contest required submitting an idea, being selected, and then crafting a three-minute speech. I wasn't there to win; I wanted to explore what it felt like to be in front of an audience for my personal development. I even asked the technical team to close the panel with the timer, so I wouldn't see it while speaking.

I prepared a simple yet effective speech that closely aligned with the three-minute time limit to avoid penalties. Through numerous rehearsals and rhetorical training with other participants, I connected my verbal expressions to my physical presence—an essential exercise for someone whose instinct is to flee from attention. During training, I had to deliver a 45-second speech on a random, humorous topic; the post office announcing it would use birds to deliver letters. This silly prompt helped me laugh and focus on delivering the speech seriously. I treated it as a game, reminding myself to look at the kind faces in the audience who were rooting for me. It went surprisingly well, easing my anxiety, and the feedback from my colleagues was encouraging.

On the day of the contest, however, anxiety gripped me again, rendering my legs numb and my mind fraught with doubt. Half an hour before my turn, I felt like I might pass out. Seeking help at the Information Point, I shared how I felt, and the staff provided quick relief in the form of dates and chocolate, which was delicious. This act of reaching out for support marked a small but significant step in learning to trust others during moments of vulnerability.

It's often said that the peak of anxiety lasts for just a minute, and I found that to be true. The challenge comes when people fear their feelings, creating a feedback loop that prolongs anxiety. I learned that grounding myself in the present moment helped me return to a relaxed state. When I found myself

ruminating on doubts and fears, I tended to my needs—like the craving for something sweet to combat my faintness—which helped bring me back into my body after spending so much time in my head. The technique of seeking out kind faces also proved to be very mindful.

As time passed, it was finally my turn to speak, and, as luck would have it, I was the first. Standing on stage, I employed the same technique my therapist had introduced: observing the supportive audience and taking a moment to connect with the eyes of 400 people, thinking that they were rooting for me and genuinely curious about what I had to say. This was my moment. Yes, I was nervous. Despite the rapid pace of my speech and some missed lines, I finished feeling both relieved and empowered. Time flew by, and I can't quite describe the feeling. A quick glance at the timer revealed I had spoken for 2:29 minutes, just shy of the 2:30 minimum, which I found amusing. The feedback was kind and understanding, recognizing the challenge of being the first speaker while acknowledging my courage.

This experience at EFA was a profound demonstration of how supportive environments can facilitate personal growth and healing. It prompted me to rethink the people I surround myself with and the importance of being a supportive human being in general. It reinforced my understanding that anxiety and capability are not mutually exclusive; one can feel intense fear yet still perform and achieve personal victories. Both can coexist, and in a forum that emphasizes polarization and the search for common ground, this realization also translates on a mental level.

This newfound insight has inspired me to pursue more public speaking opportunities, lead seminars, and continue sharing my experiences openly. I've reframed public speaking: instead of addressing a crowd, I'm speaking to individuals—many people interested in what I have to say. The European Forum Alpbach was not just a conference; it was a sanctuary that supported my mental health and empowered me to embrace challenges. It taught me the importance of community and the healing power of shared understanding.

Even the seminars from the first week supported this idea: coming together regardless of our backgrounds or beliefs, seeking common ground, and aligning with the truth of research across various domains. It has been a great honor to be a scholarship holder. Moving forward, I am committed to exploring these themes more deeply, both personally and professionally, and to helping others understand that they too can find their voice amidst their fears.

Finding my voice won't stop with the Speakers' Night contest; this is only the beginning. I will listen to my own advice: focus on what I have to say and explore new ideas. Remember, the journey from point A (who you are now) to

point B (who you want to be) is called experience, and the European Forum Alpbach provides that—an experimentation of all kinds! It may seem like a big leap to start with such a large audience, but understanding yourself, finding supportive people, and sharing your feelings are among the greatest gifts you can give yourself. That alone is enough. It might take time, but you are the biggest project you will ever work on.

The Price of Connection: Shaping Our Attention **Speech by Sonia Mogojan**

2024 is a decisive year for European politics, and we live in a world where truth and reality are often filtered through the lens of social media. I would argue that social media is not just a tool for connection—it has become a psychological landscape that shapes our minds in ways we are only beginning to understand.

The allure of social media lies in its promise of connection, validation, and belonging. But what happens when those promises come at a cost? Because if something is free, then you are the product.

Research shows that the dopamine-driven feedback loops—those likes, shares, and comments—create an addictive cycle, where the brain becomes wired to seek instant gratification and external validation.

But the implications of social media extend far beyond personal relationships and mental health—they reach into the very fabric of our society, influencing our politics and collective behavior. The same platforms that connect us also have the power to divide us.

This brings us to social identity theory. In social psychology, this theory explains how individuals categorize themselves into groups based on shared characteristics, beliefs, or values. On social media, the categorization effect is amplified, and as our beliefs are validated, opposing viewpoints are ignored or dismissed. Even worse, social media algorithms favor this effect, and in the midst of an election, this is not a favorable position for someone who wants to make a change.

So, here's my challenge for you: take a moment to critically examine your social media feed. Look at the content you're consuming and ask yourself, "Is this reinforcing my beliefs, or is it challenging me to think differently?" Dare to consider unfollowing or muting sources that only reinforce your existing opinions, and seek out diverse perspectives.

To make an informed decision for the future of Europe, you have to reclaim your own mind—to think critically, to question, and to choose what truly

deserves your focus.

Because remember:

Your mind follows in the footsteps of your attention.

'Breaking Glass' by Christina Steinhart

Heart pounding, palms sweating, her cheeks flushed with the rush of blood coursing through her body, she took a shaky step forward. It was her moment to speak her truth—her time, here and now. Fear crept in. All her life, she had hidden in the shadows of her accomplishments, letting praise serve as camouflage instead of transforming it into her crown. As her hand reached for the door handle, she paused, taking a deep breath, reminding herself of who she was and where she came from—the rivers and storms she had braved, the mountains she had conquered (Gratlspeitz among the toughest), and the future she envisioned. She had made an impact in her community and touched lives, yet she longed for more. She wanted to be braver, kinder, and more generous.

Beyond that door lay her future. Maybe it was just one conversation, a handshake, a smile, or even a spilled beer or Krautinger that would set things in motion. Her future was within her reach, and she deserved it. She exhaled, releasing the tension that had built up inside. Gathering her strength, she pressed the handle down, imagining the incredible people she would meet, the places she would go, and the things she would learn.

But just as the door opened, she hesitated. The unknown frightened her, and she trembled at the thought of being truly seen. Yet the desire to be known was stronger than her fear. She wanted to be understood beyond her name, job, or hobbies—the things she had repeated endlessly at networking events. Stripping away all the external labels, she revealed her core, her naked soul. Especially the parts she had kept hidden, guarded by anxiety and the fear of being truly known.

Inside her was still the curious child who once danced freely, screamed with joy, and ran barefoot through the dirt, leaving her mark. The girl who was afraid to raise her hand in class for fear of being labeled a nerd. The girl embarrassed by

her farm roots and afraid to stand up to bullies. The girl who never spoke of her pain for fear of burdening others, carrying the weight on her small shoulders. The girl too scared to admit her crush on another girl, terrified no one would accept her. The girl who, feeling she didn't belong, eventually learned she had ADHD, found her chosen family, and built a home out of her brokenness. She had come a long way, and now, she was ready to speak her truth.

Reflecting on her journey over the past days, she thought of the moments that transformed her: mind-opening seminars, heart-pumping hikes, dance-filled nights, and deep self-discovery in meditation and conversation. Her heart was still racing, but she refused to let fear stand in the way any longer. She was ready to face yet another round of small talk and introductions. But this time, she wasn't just going to say her name or list her achievements—she was ready to speak from her heart.

The people beyond the door, no matter how impressive their titles or accomplishments, were just as human as she was. All shared the same fragility, the same desire for love, and the same dream of changing the world. She was no different, and that truth empowered her. Tightening her grip on the door handle, she pushed it open.

As she stepped forward, leaving her past struggles behind, a cascade of champagne flutes toppled to the floor with a loud crash, bubbles and glass scattering everywhere. Not the graceful entrance she had imagined, and certainly not what the other participants expected. Her face flushed, and she tried to remind herself that she was only human—a very clumsy human, but human nonetheless. They say first impressions matter, but she believed that nothing could break the ice like humour and authenticity.

Laughter burst from her, filling the room. To her surprise, it spread quickly, turning her moment of embarrassment into one of curiosity. Soon, people gathered around, eager to hear her story. She spoke of her passion for nature, her hunger for justice, and her dream of a Europe where everyone could live with dignity, united in diversity. The words flowed effortlessly, and as she spoke, the layers of her being fell away. At first, she felt exposed—but then, she felt seen.

She had come to Alpbach to meet the world, but in the end, she found herself. She had come to change the world, but it was her world that was changed.

'Bosnian Coffee' by Emina Pašanović

The sun was setting, casting its golden light on the Old Town of Sarajevo, illuminating the rain-soaked cobblestone streets. The scent of freshly grilled *cevapi* filled the air, mingling with the rich aroma of Bosnian coffee, luring in pedestrians. The gentle sound of the call to prayer from a nearby mosque, along with the tolling bells from the Sacred Heart Cathedral and the Orthodox Church, harmonized with the lively chatter and clinking of cafés. As I strolled through the city, its rhythm felt unchanged, despite the passing years.

Before me lay the heart of the Old Town, *Baščaršija*—a labyrinth of narrow, winding streets paved with stones worn smooth by centuries of footsteps. Picturesque shops lined the narrow alleys, displaying intricately crafted copper and silver goods, colorful carpets, and shimmering jewelry, all catching the last beams of sunlight. Wooden eaves on the historic houses arched beautifully overhead, providing a sense of sanctuary, as if the very architecture was designed to welcome you in its warm embrace.

Sarajevo, where East meets West at the heart of Europe, felt alive. It seemed as though every building and pathway held a memory, every alley had its own secrets. As I strolled, I could sense the beating heart of history beneath my steps. Set against the golden hues of the setting sun, the minarets and church towers stood tall – symbols of Sarajevo's rich tapestry of diversity, quietly observing the city's lively pulse.

As I walked, I passed a copperware shop, admiring the craftsmanship and the familiar shape of the traditional coffee cup, *fildžan*. A sense of warmth and home spread through me.

“You like it?” the artisan asked, leaning against the wooden door.

"I always have," I replied, smiling. "Whenever my family wanted to come together, bond, and talk about life, they would bring these out."

"Of course," he laughed. "It's tradition. We've been using them for generations, and for many, it's their favorite part of the day!"

He lifted a *fildžan* with pride. "Each one holds a story, just like the people who drink from them. Making these isn't easy, but the joy comes from imagining where they've traveled. I wish for those who buy them to discover the spirit of community embedded in each one, connecting them as they enjoy their coffee, just like we do."

"It's curious how, over time, certain objects and rituals take on a life of their own, becoming symbols of unity and connection," I reflected.

"The philosophy surrounding Bosnian coffee is that there is no right or wrong way to enjoy it, as people spend lifetimes perfecting their own unique rituals. Nevertheless, something everyone agrees on is that coffee is not just about coffee—it is about the people with whom you spend this time with, and the stories you share. In return, these special cups treasure and remember all of them," he said, beaming.

I chuckled at the thought of a *fildžan* having its own personality, finding joy in conversations happening around it. I pictured its delighted grin and wide, inquisitive eyes soaking up the lively atmosphere, feeling like it had completed its life's mission. Maybe that is where the phrase "eyes like *fildžani*"¹ comes from...

"I agree. These cups, like our traditions, have deeper purpose—they connect people," I mused, glancing at the shiny *fildžan*, imagining it playfully winking at me, showing off its bright, copper coating.

With a knowing smile, he uttered, "It's what you make of it," bid me farewell,

¹ The phrase "**Oči k'o fildžani**" (eyes like fildžani) carries a few distinct meanings in Bosnian language. Traditionally, it is used to describe someone with large, round, and expressive eyes, often evoking a sense of depth or curiosity, akin to the small coffee cups known as fildžani, which symbolize hospitality and connection in the culture. On the other hand, the phrase also has a more casual, playful use. In a more colloquial sense, the phrase is used humorously to describe someone who appears tired, with puffy or swollen eyes due to lack of sleep. Friends frequently use it playfully to point out a sleep-deprived person's fatigue. Thus, the expression intertwines cultural symbolism with informal commentary on both exhaustion and inquisitiveness.

and returned inside.

My face lit up as I remembered where I had heard those words before. I muttered to myself while grinning, "It's not an ordinary conference indeed..." I continued on my way to *Miris Dunja*, a cozy Bosnian café, and recalled my first trip to Alpbach.

A decade has passed since then, but the memories remain vivid. Each year I leave Alpbach, but Alpbach never leaves me. Friendships and connections prevail, resisting time's flow.

I entered the café and was greeted by the warm atmosphere of low tables and traditional seating, where people gather to chat, laugh and share stories. Vintage photos of Sarajevo adorned the walls, accompanied by the familiar hum of conversation. Here, much like in Alpbach, friendships were formed, and ideas took roots.

I ordered Bosnian coffee, its dark, thick liquid poured into a *džezva*, the copper pot, a standing tradition of Bosnia's coffee culture. As I waited for my companions, I remembered my first visit to Alpbach in 2022 as a scholarship holder. Back then, the world seemed vast and out of reach, and I was just a young woman from Bosnia and Herzegovina, standing at the threshold of something much bigger than I could ever imagine. I had no idea how much Alpbach would shape me in the coming years, but I was ready to board that ship and go wherever it might lead me. This was my moment of truth.

Five bright, eager faces stare at me from across the table—scholarship holders from Bosnia and Herzegovina for this year. They are young, bright and talented, yet unsure of how to articulate the words weighing in on their chests. They remind me of myself back then, driven by ambition and the urge to excel, but lacking clear direction and strategy. Doubt flickers in their eyes, the same questions brewing within them as they had in me: How do I make the most of this? How do I build lasting connections? How do I leave my mark?

"The first time I went to Alpbach," I begin, "I felt overwhelmed. I remember walking into the congress center, surrounded by Europe's brightest minds. I didn't know where to begin or how to make the most of it." I poured the coffee slowly and it trickled down leisurely, its warmth spreading and settling comfortably in its place, while this group of young talents watched attentively, mirroring the same sense of openness. I smiled, comprehending their emotions and knowing they would find their own unique place in Alpbach, similar to how this coffee had effortlessly found its own—something they were yet to realize.

Gentle *sevdalinka*² tune softly played in the background, its melancholic notes drifting through the air. The *sevdalinka* serves as a symbol of yearning, love, and finding beauty in hardship.

“Alpbach, like Sarajevo, is a place where different worlds and cultures meet,” I continue. “Just as Sarajevo is often called the ‘Jerusalem of Europe’ - with a mosque, synagogue, a Catholic and an Orthodox church all within 200 meters of each other - Alpbach gathers people from across the globe. Alpbach showcases a colorful blend of different nationalities, beliefs, and cultures, creating a rich diversity. Yet, despite this variety, there exists a strong feeling of unity and interconnectedness.”

“You will attend inspiring panels and thought-provoking debates, but what will stay with you, at the end of the day, are the connections you make, the friendships you form. They will become the backbone of your future support system, made up of people like yourselves—driven to make a difference.”

I take a sip of coffee, feeling its warmth. The café’s atmosphere is perfect for an open, honest conversation.

“Don’t let the pressure of perfection hold you back,” I add. “Some of the most valuable insights come from imperfect moments. The fear of failure shouldn’t stop you from taking that first step or approaching someone new.” They exchange glances, listening intently.

“The pressure to excel can be quite overwhelming, but remember—no one has it all figured out,” I reassure them. “Beneath all the achievements and flags at Alpbach are human beings, just like you. We feel the same fears and we breathe, laugh and cry like everyone else. Be mindful that everyone is fighting their own battles and we are all trying our best to find our place under the sky and make the most out of our circumstances. We have to ride the waves of life, good or bad, until the tide turns, and it always does. What matters is that you show up, feel the fear and do it anyway. It is not the time to be afraid; it is the time to be alive.”

As Brené Brown once said, “Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having

² *Sevdalinka*, a traditional Bosnian folk music genre, symbolizes profound emotional expression, often centered around themes of love, longing, and melancholy. Rooted in Bosnia’s Ottoman-influenced past, it reflects the country’s rich multicultural heritage and resilience. Sevdalinka serves as a form of storytelling, passed down through generations, preserving the collective memory, cultural identity, and emotional depth of the Bosnian people, blending Eastern and Western musical influences.

the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.”

I gaze at the street outside, trying to capture the sense of oneness and harmony I experienced in Alpbach. A fond memory crosses my mind, and my face lights up with a smile as I become eager to share the feeling.

“You know, back in 2024, a year known as a global super election year, I was a member of the Forum Alpbach Network Committee. The EFA arts and culture program introduced an idea to stage elections in Alpbach under the theme ‘How to Inhabit the Future.’ Inspired by the sea anemone, the Rhizome Rule team presented a brilliant concept, encouraging us to unite, while highlighting the importance of teamwork, much like ants working together in swarms.”

Their expressions shift, intrigued by the concept.

“Our strength lies in our unity. Alpbach brings together the people who will shape the world in the years to come. If you nurture the connections you make, we will create a world where challenges are less intimidating because we’ll be stronger together.”

I glance at the coffee cups—*fildžani*—between us, realizing they resemble us as people. Each one unique, yet part of a larger set. Alone, they are beautiful, but together, they create something more complete.

“Moreover, bear in mind that the conversations you’ll have won’t just be about policies and geopolitics. You will come to understand that while nations may divide us and language barriers may intimidate us, being human and showing kindness is universal. It is the language of love and friendship. You will leave Alpbach with project ideas and memories, but more importantly, you will leave with friends you can turn to for the rest of your life.”

They lean in, genuinely engaged, realizing that “making connections” goes much deeper than it seems.

In the meantime, rain begins to fall again, the droplets creating a soothing ambiance as they dance on the roof in a melodic pattern—setting the stage for an important exchange of knowledge, much like the fireside chats at the loggia.

“You talked about making connections, but how do we ensure they’re meaningful? Everyone seems to be so busy these days,” said one girl, her thoughtful expression reflecting her careful consideration of the ideas.

“That’s an excellent question—and an important one.”

I lean back and recall countless uplifting talks with Alpbach friends that made me feel like anything is possible.

“It’s like planting seeds. Every conversation, every shared idea is a seed. Some sprout right away, others take time to grow, and a few may bloom years later. The key is to nurture those seeds. Do not hesitate to reach out after Alpbach—show genuine curiosity instead of sticking to formalities. Check in on the projects, ask for advice, and share your own challenges. It’s not about staying in constant contact, but about showing that the connection is real, valuable and worth investing in.

“It’s true that everyone has their own path and battles to fight. But knowing there are people out there, supporting you from thousands of miles away, is invaluable. Cherish those moments of understanding. They make your life better.

“Think of it like this coffee we’re sharing. It’s not just about this moment, but about the warmth and conversation it sparks. Nurture that warmth, and you’ll find those connections lasting long after the coffee’s gone.”

They exchange meaningful glances, nodding thoughtfully, clearly grasping the depth of the idea. One of them leans forward, a smile flickering across his face.

“I hadn’t thought of it like that. While I recognize how important connections are, it’s also exhausting trying to spark them with everyone. But nurturing the ones we’ve already formed—that makes sense.”

Another scholarship holder, still holding his *fildžan*, adds quietly, “It’s comforting to think of it that way, that distance won’t matter if the friendship and intentions are real.”

They exchange genuine smiles, realizing the beautiful story that lay ahead, full of memories and connections that will never fade.

“One last thing,” I say, standing up to leave. “Don’t be afraid to be bold. EFA is like a spark, one that will imprint itself on you. You will face setbacks and challenges in your lives, and the world outside Alpbach may feel uncertain and scary. Nevertheless, the connections, the inspiration, wisdom and support you carry from Alpbach will follow you everywhere. One day, you might be shaping the policies that affect us today. Know that you will not be doing it alone. All around the world, there will be people like you, people you call friends, doing the same. You stood side by side in Alpbach, where every voice matters and everyone can contribute equally.”

I raise my *fildžan*, a small symbol of tradition and connection, woven into all threads of our conversation.

“Alpbach, much like this coffee, is rich in its texture and profound. It brings people together, sparks conversations, and leaves you with something to reflect on long after the cup is empty,” I conclude, a deep sense of gratitude washing over me. I have the privilege of feeling this way about a place I now call home outside of home—a place that gave me more than I could have ever imagined.

We rise to say our farewells, the room filled with hope and inspiration. There is a silent agreement that what had started with Bosnian coffee and conversation would last. The ideas shared linger in the air, as if the walls themselves are absorbing the energy of young leaders, ready to take on the world. I look at their bright faces, full of hope and unwavering dedication to shaping a better future, and in this moment, I know the world is in safe hands.

I leave the café trusting that the legacy will continue and that the spirit of Alpbach will live on, supporting them in their future endeavors. We are not just spectators in this world; we are its architects. Together, united, we can build something beautiful and lasting, something future generations will be proud to call their own.

This memory crosses my mind everytime I pass by the familiar copperware shop. The *fildžan* wink at me through the window glass, and I could almost swear they whisper to me, “Alpbach is not just an ordinary conference; it’s what you make of it...”

'Alpine Reflections on the Demise of Liberal Peace' by Tobias Sauer

It's remarkable who gathers in a small Tyrolean village to discuss the state of Europe and the world. Former and current heads of state, ministers, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs join us scholarship holders. We, who are meant to embody what comes after "Europe's Moment of Truth.". Explaining this to outsiders is not easy.

The Forum Alpbach features exclusive receptions, sunrise hikes with members of parliament, traditional songs in a cabin overlooking the alpine valley and fireside chats where one can philosophize about the state of the world with Joschka Fischer or Josef Mitterer. It all seems a bit conspiratorial, yet the intention is another one.

The forum boasts of concepts of diversity and awareness. It features open calls for registration and a whole ecosystem of national and regional clubs promoting the forum in their communities. Those who are fortunate to obtain one of hundreds of scholarships can participate free of charge. We scholarship holders then, are to be multipliers, aiming to create impact across our communities. The density of Anglicisms among the Austrian dialect audible throughout Alpbach alone reflects the ongoing internationalization of the forum.

Still, I wonder for whom this effort is made. Is it about gaining insight—the actual development of a European future that participants are meant to implement? Or is it merely a stage that serves as a convenient excuse for an exclusive networking event, a nice alpine retreat for a European elite and those who wish to become part of it?

My first instinct in answering such questions is to look back at the history and context in question. The Alpbach Forum has a rich history. Originally founded by members of the anti-fascist resistance, EFA was meant to address the concern that the younger generation had lost the necessary values and predispositions for peaceful coexistence. In the late 1940s, students and partisans gathered in Alpbach to undertake "a comprehensive renewal of intellectual life in Europe." Initially, it was an adventurous endeavor, financed through cigarette smuggling. Participants slept in barns instead of hotels and guesthouses.

What remains of this legacy today? Nominally, the idea and mission are still the same. The founders saw the political unity of Europe as the only path to peace. Today, we are made painfully aware of the absence of this unity, and the consequent dearth in peace. It is no coincidence that this year's events in Alpbach prominently featured EU expansions in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.

However, something has changed. The young forum faced an iron curtain that limited ambitions for the political unification of the continent. Europe was divided into two poles, and only the collapse of one side allowed for the continuation of the European project. But this continuation has remained incomplete.

The current boundary of European aspirations for unity runs through the Donbas, drawn and reinforced by the violence of an aggressive war. Many point to the parallels between today and the Cold War, but there is an important difference. Both sides were in tacit agreement (later codified in the INF and CFE) that a stable security order depended on the respective other. Each side, Warsaw Pact and NATO, needed the other to prevent the next war—this was the basis for Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Today, there is no such dynamic.

Those who listened attentively to Andreas Treichl's opening speech will have noted that his vision of a peaceful Europe was based on the usual trinity of democracy, the rule of law, and a market economy. However, more significant than the familiar refrain of liberal peace was his acknowledgment of those "motherfuckers" (his words, not mine) who do not share these values and even undermine them. A peaceful Europe, he stated, requires the capability to resist these spoilers.

In this regard, Mr. Treichl aligns with a trend in European self-understanding (although his rhetoric might be considered exotic in this regard). While each country has its own interpretation of this process, the German *Zeitenwende*, the French *autonomie stratégique*, and the Finnish *turvallisuus muutos*, they all direct the European project *against* one actor—namely, Russia.

The European peace project no longer seems to depend on the integration of Russia. Even worse, the Kremlin has betrayed the shared values of international law, the European Declaration of Human Rights, and the Charter of the United Nations with its brutal invasion of Ukraine. Thus, it is only logical to exclude Vladimir Putin's Russia (and his vassals in Minsk) from this community of values.

Nevertheless, this narrative is bound to miss a key point: the idea of liberal peace—nations trading as free markets instead of waging war—wasn't first challenged in February 2022. After the Soviet Union's collapse, the liberal order emerged as the dominant global model. Austerity, free trade and fiscal discipline transgressed to global norms of good governance.

Yet, the liberal order's triumph sowed the seeds of its crisis. Conflicts, once stabilized by the competition of two superpowers, now erupted. The bloody breakup of Yugoslavia and the genocides in Srebrenica and Rwanda revealed both local strife and the global community's failure to respond.

Under the responsibility to protect, the U.S. reformulated their claim as hegemon over this global order. To protect human rights, it became indispensable to subordinate the sovereignty of individual states to this protection—if necessary, with military force. The preemptive strike against impending genocide was thus not only conceivable but demanded. By bombing Belgrade, the Allies stopped Milosevic from a massacre against the Albanians in Kosovo, but they did so without a mandate from the United Nations.

Even though Operation Allied Forces was unlawful under international law, its protective character was plausible in light of Milosevic's previous crimes and the massacre at Racak. However, this cannot be said about the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Even supporters of that war now acknowledge its moral failings. The sitting President of the United States is just the most prominent example.

To be clear, this is not an attempt at relativising the crimes of the Russian army in Bucha or Poltava by referencing American or Western transgressions. Rather, examining our handling of these events helps us understand why “the West” struggles so much in the “global South,” shedding light on the often-cited “credibility crisis.”

The idea of a liberal world order based on international law rather than the law of the jungle effectively died the moment the American war crimes in Iraq went unpunished. So, when we stand up today and rightfully label Putin as the criminal he is, we should be aware of this double standard. Critiquing the “motherfuckers” who conspire against our community of values can only be

credible if we take those values seriously ourselves.

This brings me back to the question for whom this forum is organized. The general inclination in Alpbach to provide solutions rather than formulate problems does not really leave room for these more fundamental concerns. It is true, we urgently need ideas to address climate change, organize our collective security, and cope with global competitiveness; however, these are mainly tasks for Europe's current leaders.

Should we really expect 20-year olds to solve carbon pricing or enhance the provision of ammunition for Ukraine? Admittedly, Alpbach gathers some of the smartest people I have ever met but these issues cannot wait until they finish their degrees. If the European Forum Alpbach wants to remain true to its motto to undertake “a comprehensive renewal of intellectual life in Europe,” it doesn't need policy pitches, hackathons and finance workshops—it needs a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about our past and future.

One of those uncomfortable truths is that we can't just shoot our “motherfucking” neighbor. Rather, we need to find other ways to deal with contestations of our values. The conversation about how this is to be done necessarily involves the generations before us and should consider those which come after us. But rather than repeating the failed mantras of a demised order, it implies self-critique, reflection and introspection—rare practices in recent times. Alpbach has been a place for this in the past, why not again?

'How to think the Future' by Jeldrik Schottke

Thinking the future... This can seem like an ambitious project, perhaps likened to gazing into a crystal ball. To clarify the purpose of this essay, it's important to first define what I mean by "thinking the future." It's not about creating the future, manifesting policies, or even determination. Instead, 'thinking the future' is about preparing for the upcoming battle of ideas, i.e. inevitable arguments. In European terms, it means being ready for potential shifts in power, staying informed in global debates, and avoiding surprises at all cost.

Hans J. Morgenthau, German-American jurist and political scientist, once said: *"...the greatness of the scholar does not alone depend upon his ability to distinguish between true and false. His greatness reveals itself above all in his ability and determination to select from among all the truths which can be known those which ought to be known."*³ Morgenthau, considered to be a "founding father" of the 20th century realist school, critiqued the misinterpretation of reason as a tool for creating a peaceful world, arguing that reason serves to harmonize irrational impulses. I would build on this thought: reason not only brings harmony to the present but also helps us prepare for the irrational impulses of the future. And since reason is deeply rooted in European thought, it can provide us with crucial, though often underestimated, advantages.

To effectively use reason in preparing for the future, we must be aware of other powers, particularly China. China's so-called "New Left," led by scholars like Chinese philosopher Jiang Shigong, is shaping an ideological path that heavily influences President Xi Jinping's policies. Shigong posits that throughout history, co-existing empires have risen and fallen in constant competition with

³ Morgenthau, Hans Joachim, *Scientific Man Vs. Power Politics*. 1. publ. in GB. London: Latimer House, 1947. p. 143.

one another. The rise of colonialism and industrialization brought about a new phenomenon which dominated the majority of the globe. This "World Empire 1.0,"⁴ as he calls it, is plagued by three unsolvable problems. First, the ever-rising inequality. Second, political decrease and state failure. Third, decadence and nihilism based on cultural liberalism. According to Shigong, the political power that solves these issues will create the blueprint for "World Empire 2.0", though he doesn't explicitly claim that China will be the one to deliver it.

While Shigong raises valid concerns regarding inequality and political decay, I strongly disagree with his third point about decadence and nihilism. In fact, I disagree with much of his theory, but that is a separate discussion. However, it is clear that China will play a dominant role in the future, and Europe must be prepared with sound arguments. Europe⁵ is not in decline, but we are searching for a new role. Contrary to Shigong's view, Europe is neither decadent nor nihilistic; our prosperity is neither old nor stable. It is still evolving, and Europeans are conscious of their achievements, not drowning in butter and dystopian suffering. Shigong severely underestimates Europe's capacity to use reason in the face of power politics and irrational forces.

As Morgenthau suggested, the greatness of thinking lies not in discerning true from false but in selecting the truths that ought to be known. While we cannot predict *all* possible futures, we can reason about which futures are most likely. Based on this reasoning, we can anticipate the irrational impulses Europe may face and throne the Goddess of Reason to navigate them.

I've already begun to critique Jiang Shigong's interpretation of the future, and this approach should be embraced by European diplomatic and political institutions. Some may argue that it already is. I am not claiming that the dispatches of Europe are missing this capability, but if Europe is to remain a prosperous place for human rights, equality and mutual respect, it must recognize that the world is an omnium-gatherum of irrational impulses. Only by upholding our tradition of reason might we build a solid rhetorical foundation for the future. Being rhetorically prepared is a speaker's virtue; being reasonably prepared is Europe's path forward. If we lose ourselves to irrationality, the European project may no longer have purpose, leaving us vulnerable to external powers. I believe this is not the outcome Europe desires.

⁴ World Empire 1.0 is led by the anglo saxon world, with the US as its head

⁵ I am using Europe as a global term since European power is built on several pillars, among them is the European Union, NATO, Council of Europe, and others.

'Truth in the Machine' by Diyya Abdulkader

There I was in my afternoon seminar, "Unraveling Reality: Journalistic Methods for Truth Seeking," struggling between conjuring an idea to write about or focusing on the lecture.

The moderator, a blunt, no-nonsense Slavic blonde journalist, asked a question that felt personal to me. "How do we, as journalists, ensure that our search for truth doesn't become a hunt for the sensational? How do we stay grounded in reality?"

The room was silent, but my brain, on the other hand, was screaming for help. I needed to say something profound, something that would echo through the seminar halls. My mind raced, flipping through the pages of my limited knowledge on journalistic integrity and truth-seeking.

Then, unconsciously, I reached for my phone and opened ChatGPT. It was a move born out of desperation. I typed as fast as I could: *Give me ideas on what to say about truth-seeking in journalism.*

And then it hit me. The irony! Here I was, in a seminar designed to peel the surface of reality, to get to the raw, unfiltered truth, and I was outsourcing my thoughts to an AI. I sat there, staring at the screen as the AI churned out answers, each one more articulate than my panicked brain could muster. My face lit with clarity, as well as embarrassment, and that was my moment of truth.

My truth was that, in my frantic search for the perfect words, I had turned to a machine. A machine that had no concept of truth, no part in reality, but could simulate both with eerie precision.

Then, it hit me: *How reflexive it has become for people to ask AI a question whenever they are stuck, in a rush, or simply not bothered to think for themselves.* Questions flooded my mind as I wondered whether humans are still making most decisions, or if AI is now guiding what we do and think.

While I can't picture a world ruled by AI, I've realized it's already happening. We're so focused on AI taking our jobs that we fail to notice it's doing something far more concerning—it's thinking for us, shaping our words, thoughts, and responses.

I looked around the room, wondering if my peers felt it too. We were all part of a system that increasingly relied on this technology, for better or worse. In that moment, I realized that my search for truth had taken a detour, leading me to confront a different kind of reality. One where the lines between human and machine blur, where the tools we create to help us might one day outgrow us, slip from our control, and reveal more than we ever intended to show.

So, I put my phone down, and I began to write—not about journalistic integrity, not about the seminar's grand themes, but about this very moment.

In the end, it wasn't just about truth-seeking anymore. It was about reckoning with the reality that in our quest for better, faster, smarter, we might be building something that one day decides our truth for us. And that, I realized, was a truth I couldn't afford to ignore.

'The Alpbach Declaration: 15 Years of Europe's Renaissance' by Benjamin Frommann

Presse am Sonntag, Vienna, August 2040

As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the **Alpbach Declaration**, I invite you, dear reader, to revisit the moment in 2025 when Europe faced an unprecedented crossroads. As you enjoy the prosperous European Union we know today, it's important to remember that it once grappled with economic stagnation, industrial decline, and energy dependency, all while political fragmentation threatened its unity. Many feared Europe's influence was waning, but the European Forum Alpbach in 2025 became a turning point that changed the course of history.

What emerged from the 80th anniversary of the Forum, was more than just a set of policies—it was a transformative vision that reignited Europe's spirit. The **Alpbach Declaration** became a blueprint for revitalizing Europe's economy and institutions, but perhaps more importantly, it sparked a cultural shift that embraced innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability as cornerstones of the continent's future. Now, in the summer of 2040, we want to look back at what transpired and how Europe was able to turn the tide.

The Crisis of 2025: A Europe Falling Behind

By the beginning of the not-so-roaring-2020s, Europe was a continent in retreat. The devastating COVID-19 pandemic and the brutal war of aggression launched by Russia in Ukraine had taken their toll. Once the beating heart of global industry, Europe's factories now lay like relics of a forgotten era—reminders of past glory but hollowed out by inefficiency and neglect. The steady flow of innovation had faded, replaced by the dissonant clatter of outdated machinery struggling to keep up with the times. The world was moving fast,

but Europe seemed stuck in slow motion. The grand promise of green energy and digital transformation remained unfulfilled, stalled by bureaucracy and political gridlock. Europe, once a pioneer, was now a follower.

The war in Ukraine sent shockwaves through the heart of Europe, causing immense human suffering, severing supply chains, and disrupting energy routes. The continent's deep dependency on Russian gas became a dangerous vulnerability. As the crisis deepened, companies began to abandon ship. Industry giants, disillusioned, moved their operations to more fertile ground; capital and talent followed, casting shadows on what was once a powerhouse. Yet, amid the chaos, Ukraine found a new place of refuge. After a long and painful struggle, the country has emerged with a sense of security and support, now standing as a member of the EU.

At the time, the financial sector fared no better. The long-discussed Capital Market Union—the key to unlocking Europe's investment potential—was still stuck in limbo, a vision unfulfilled. Fragmented financial systems, hampered by differing national rules, kept capital within borders. Investment had no clear path to flow, leaving Europe's innovators with scarce resources.

Meanwhile, the political landscape grew darker. Populist movements, fueled by economic hardship, gained momentum. Disillusioned with the EU and its seeming inability to act, many called for a return to national sovereignty. The very idea of European unity, once a bedrock of stability, showed signs of cracking under pressure.

Alpbach 2025: A Defining Moment

In the summer of 2025, The European Forum Alpbach, once solely a gathering for intellectual debate, became the birthplace of something far greater—a new spirit of renewal and hope. This moment didn't just spark policy changes; it ignited a deeper transformation in how Europe viewed itself and its potential. Led by Ursula von der Leyen and her commissioners, the Forum set the stage for decisive action. Yet, what truly emerged was a shift in mindset. No longer burdened by the fear of economic stagnation, Europe began to embrace a future driven by innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability.

Alongside this shift was the embrace of “digital humanism” - a commitment to using technology, including AI and quantum computing, in ways that prioritize human dignity, creativity, and ethical responsibility. The 12 Principles of the AI Constitution, introduced in 2033, further emphasized this ethos, ensuring that AI serves the public good and remains transparent.

What was most remarkable about Alpbach 2025 wasn't just the policy decisions

made - it was the underlying shift in Europe's collective attitude toward progress. Discussions centered on how the continent could move forward by fostering innovation and embracing new technologies, while remaining true to its core values.

For years, Europe had hesitated to fully embrace its potential, but the Alpbach Declaration symbolized a turning point. Industry leaders and policymakers alike agreed that Europe's future lay in its ability to innovate, build, and create. One key outcome of the Forum was the realization of the Capital Market Union (CMU). For years, fragmented financial systems had held Europe back, preventing it from competing fully on a global scale. By unifying capital markets, the continent unlocked vast new opportunities for investment, enabling startups, businesses, and industries to flourish.

The CMU wasn't just about finance; it reflected a deeper belief in the power of collaboration across borders. With easier access to capital, European businesses were empowered to innovate, scale, and contribute to the continent's renewal. This ability to bring together resources from across the continent symbolized the new spirit of unity and forward-thinking that had taken root.

In the months following Alpbach, Europe concluded historic free trade agreements, including the long-awaited Mercosur deal and the TTIP agreement. In hindsight, one can hardly imagine the challenges of that time, but finalizing these agreements was a significant milestone and difficult to achieve. These agreements didn't just expand market access—they reflected Europe's new confidence in its ability to compete globally. The continent no longer viewed trade as a threat but as an opportunity to grow, share, and innovate together with democratic allies.

2040: A Spirit of Renewal & Looking forward

Now, fifteen years after EFA 2025, Europe has undergone a remarkable transformation. What began as a response to crisis has evolved into a broader cultural and economic renewal. Innovation and entrepreneurship, once stifled by hesitation and regulation, now thrive as vital parts of the continent's fabric. We should all celebrate the bold steps taken through a change in approach towards free market economies, driven by both individual initiative and political leadership.

However, looking ahead to 2045, Europe must continue building on these foundations to fully realize its potential. The spirit of Alpbach lives on, reminding us that the journey toward renewal is an ongoing process—one that demands both optimism and relentless effort.

'Is There a Place for Both of Us?' by Juraj Obrež

Hi AI! I don't need, but I would like your help today.

We will answer a burning existential question: Will you, Artificial Intelligence, replace my purpose?

Act as a young student at the start of their professional career. Act as a young intellect who spent 2 weeks at an altitude of 970 metres, a place wanting you to be heard through echoes bouncing off the Alps. Act as a person influenced by Nobelists, politicians, corporate executives, and scientists. Act as a person who is trying to find their moment of truth. A person who wants to understand their purpose in the world. A person sitting at the crossroads of dream-chasing and following social expectations. Act as someone unsure about their future and passion. Act as someone who might be insecure or have imposter syndrome.

You are that person. Imagine your thought process when you understand what Artificial Intelligence in 2024 can do. Suddenly, you are worried if there is a point in pursuing your career, if you are replaceable. One thing you always thought about was finding your spot and role in society. Have you lost your purpose?

You attended the conference and met many influential people. I am going to share with you some of the thoughts you encountered during that period that could influence your final statement.

AI is a type of algorithm, we had them and used them before, and we still called them only algorithms, but what is different with AI? We define Artificial Intelligence when it knows something we are not aware of. If we define AI through that definition, we can easily conclude that each AI produced will be

just another algorithm some period after its release.

Let us understand how this AI or algorithm works. You are standing in front of 2 windows, one serving fantastic food and the other serving uneatable dishes. You must write one sentence in Chinese (this analogy works only if you do not understand Chinese). Once you send them a sentence in proper Chinese, you receive this incredible plate of food, but if it is gibberish, then you get the worst food you tried. Through astonishing trials and errors, you will learn how to receive food from a better window. Does this mean you know Chinese? Most probably not, but you still learned how to give the correct answer, even though you don't understand its logic. How can AI be intelligent if trained to provide the right answer? Is the correct answer always the right answer? Is that answer the truth at all times?

On the other hand, there is a scenario where AI can take your purpose. Corporate shareholders constantly need more profits, more revenue growth, and cost reduction. Can human labor be at risk of being replaced with Artificial Intelligence to reduce costs? To which margins would managers be willing to reduce their workforce to increase productivity and reduce costs while retaining revenue to increase profits? AI will undoubtedly create new jobs to replace those now needless occupations with the emergence of AI. Will the human labor force be ready to adapt efficiently to those new jobs?

I will not give you any more instructions or arguments to think about. Refrain from telling me what I would like to hear, tell me what you objectively think based on all the input given. I will not manipulate your answer and show it the same as you responded. With all that in mind, share your thoughts on the burning question, "Will you, Artificial Intelligence, replace my purpose?" in 2-3 sentences with a direct answer.

AI's response: "Standing at this crossroads, I realize that while AI may take over certain tasks or roles, it cannot replace my unique purpose. My value lies not just in the work I do, but in the creativity, empathy, and human experience I bring to it. AI might change the landscape, but it can never replace the essence of what it means to be human—my ability to dream, to question, and to find meaning in the world."

The last paragraph of AI's response is completely untouched from the human side. It is copied from the ChatGPT's AI response. Other parts of the text did not use such tools as ChatGPT or any other Generative AI tools.

'Man in the Mirror | rorrim eht ni naM' by Alexander Gstrein

In order to be understood correctly from the very start, this title and the entire essay addresses all genders equally and invites all people in this world to think—to think along and, above all, to think ahead. Why I still chose this title is because it is a song by Michael Jackson, which speaks a clear language. Loosely translated, the song says: If you want to improve the world, start with yourself first. Or even more direct: Stop talking, start acting!

How easy it is to point the finger at others or simply blame politicians! It is much more difficult to take responsibility, make decisions, and take concrete action ourselves. I would like to share exactly this observation here. While guilt is sought and supposedly found in others, one's own (shared) responsibility is often completely forgotten, perhaps even repressed. I explain this phenomenon by suggesting that increasing populism leads to a kind of simplification. Complex political processes are presented as child's play, and it seems all too logical to ask why this or that hasn't already been "better." It is even more convenient when people can feel safe in the anonymity of a like-minded crowd, never having to prove whether they actually did "everything differently" than the incumbent political protagonists.

Philosophically speaking, citizens are largely the state. Citizens form families, families form society, and society forms the state. It should therefore be obvious that we should make similar concessions to political actors as we do to ordinary citizens in our families. Here too, decisions are often not consensual, sometimes even patriarchal or tyrannical. If we want to hold on to democracy as a form of government and as the driving force of the European Union, we must accept, for better or for worse, that regulations require patience,

perseverance, flexibility, and mutual understanding.

Since Michael Jackson sings that we should start with ourselves, I was pleased to accept the challenge in 2019 of making an active contribution to the European Forum Alpbach alongside Colonel Josef Königshofer, Captain Julia Wenninger, and three students (cadets) from the Theresian Military Academy. We introduced a new seminar idea focusing on leadership in connection with the general theme of the forum. Back then, it was anything but evident that such a seminar, led by soldiers, would be well received by EFA students. Against all expectations, around 100 students wanted to get one of the 25 planned seminar seats. This seminar has since grown to accommodate forty participants each year and is held in a peer-to-peer format. Now, the students of the Theresian Military Academy themselves design and conduct an outdoor leadership training for EFA students during the forum's first week of seminars. Years later, the seminar is still well received by the EFA students, and its main theme still remains.

Leadership, understood in its entirety, encompasses how people interact, make decisions, and take responsibility. In a state of responsibility, the question of "guilt" seems to have become increasingly prevalent in recent public debates. Therefore, we deliberately ignore it within our own seminar. We consciously focus on the "What for?" instead of the "Why?"

As similar as these two questions may seem, they usually trigger different thought processes. The question "Why?" is backward-looking; it aims to identify the momentum in the past that led to the current situation. This involves searching for reasons, often presented in a simplified cause-and-effect manner: "Because 'X' happened back then, therefore 'Y' is true now." Our socialization and our attitude towards the respective topic (at least subconsciously) play an important role. Conjectures quickly become supposed facts, and those involved are often accused. Its usefulness must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. While it can make sense to examine the past, it should not be for its own sake. What has happened has happened. Our focus should be on drawing lessons and making conclusions for the future as quickly as possible. In this case, the question "What for?" is much more helpful. It is directed towards the future and serves as a basis for projection. That is precisely the primary task of a leader: to think ahead.

Since 2019, we as the Austrian Armed Forces have been on site exclusively in uniform as part of the seminar week in Alpbach. We are visible and approachable to all, creating learning spaces where young people can and should explore for themselves. Seminar attendees are deliberately led into situations that require them to make courageous decisions and promote cohesion across all (linguistic, ethnic, ideological, etc.) boundaries. These young

people learn what it means to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. They experience firsthand that the more serious the consequences of a decision, the fewer people will actually want to make it, let alone accept the responsibility that comes with it. The idea is that this seminar doesn't end after five days; rather, it begins to bear fruit as participants process and share their experiences worldwide.

With this in mind, I invite you to listen to Michael Jackson's song, engage in self-reflection, and honestly ask yourself: Are you still complaining, or are you already deciding and taking actions that require you to take responsibility for their consequences?

'Looking for More Men in Finance' by Patrick Silvan Scheiwiller

At EFA 2024, particularly in my seminar on finance, it became clear that our engagement with finance needs to extend beyond simply listening to David Guetta x Girl On Couch's "Looking for a Man in Finance" at parties. We are regularly confronted with developments in the capital markets through the news, yet most of us are never taught about these financial markets, their functioning, significance, potential, and dangers for one's capital. Fortunately, the seminar "Finance Unleashed: Innovate, Invest, Inspire" changed this for me. EFA has shown me that, regardless of one's goals, finance is important. It is clearly significant if you want to increase your wealth. However, if you aim to have a positive impact on the world, finance is crucial as well – whether for a more sustainable economy, for economic development in poorer countries, for raising the general welfare, or for creating useful goods. Therefore, integrating finance and economy as one of the four themes of the forum absolutely makes sense and benefits the participants.

Vitally Needed Impetus for European Competitiveness

Finance also plays an important role in the competitiveness of the European economy. As EFA's president Andreas Treichl pointed out, progress toward a long-debated capital market union would provide the EU with a much-needed impetus to avoid falling further behind the U.S., China, and soon India. It is quite bizarre that EU member states, which have shaken off widespread scepticism towards capital markets and have profited from a historically growing market through pension investments, inadvertently strengthen the U.S. economy, as its financial markets are far ahead.

Innovation Over Degrowth

Another crucial topic requiring finance and playing a major role in sustainability is innovation. My morning seminar, "Innovation as an Alternative to Degrowth", aimed to closely examine the concept "innovation". The seminar title overtly indicated a preference that contrasted with the prevalent opinions of the participants. A memorable exchange occurred when one participant remarked that we did not need growth, only to be countered by another who pointed out that he himself wore products like an Apple watch and On Running shoes. This illustrates that, in a free market economy, consumers hence all of us set the tone through our buying behaviour. We should thus rather be aware of our impact instead of just pointing at the industry that is guided by our purchasing behaviour in order to make profit. It seems, furthermore, that people benefit from acquiring products, thereby fostering economic growth. Therefore, we should strengthen innovation to address sustainability challenges. We discussed how innovations in various fields can improve living conditions in Africa during group work or learned more about advancements in the space sector.

More Authenticity for the Ivory Tower

Two issues were omnipresent at EFA: climate change and inequality. Indeed, these are significant topics in the public discourse. After many private conversations – something EFA is particularly conducive to – the forum revealed a major problem among the elite: big words often fade when it comes to personal actions. Be it the climate activist who flies to Paris because it is cheaper and more convenient, or the billionaire who deflects when asked about the massive executive compensation he authorised, authenticity can be hard to find. There are always two sides to choose from and many shades of grey in between. Which path is the right one often comes down to argumentation. However, not acting according to the chosen path results in hypocrisy. Good intentions are an important first step, but corresponding action is necessary to truly stand by those intentions. From a micro to a macro perspective, the world can only improve when we uphold our commitments. Let us question our own behaviour and strive for greater authenticity.

Broadening Opinion Corridors

I remember discussing the topic of firearms with another participant after a military officer joined us at the table. While the officer and I pointed out that a world without the need for weapons would be desirable, we acknowledged the reality of needing to be armed to defend freedom and the rule of law. Unexpectedly, she responded that she believed we are unable to tolerate differing opinions. This left us baffled during an otherwise calm discourse. On

another day, she would not greet me back in the supermarket. This incident highlighted a dangerous tendency toward being thin-skinned and underscored the need to continue the president's remarks at the seminar's opening ceremony about tolerating differing opinions. Diversity extends beyond ethnicity or gender; we often differ most in our opinions. EFA has given me the opportunity to engage with people who hold different views. Let us broaden our opinion corridors, cultivate vibrant discourse, and discuss ideas beyond the mainstream.

Dialogue Across Generations

For this purpose, Alpbach is the ideal place. It offers various platforms for dialogue, and the participants are truly international. Additionally, the few events traditionally orientated for senior attendees remind us that the average age at EFA is strikingly low for a renowned forum, yet it includes individuals of all ages and career stages. The generous scholarships facilitate youth involvement and mitigate the strong tendency for the forum to attract "rich kids" who differ only in nationality or ethnicity but often lack socio-economic diversity. It is common in Alpbach for seniors to engage in conversations with younger individuals, making it a great intergenerational forum. Alpbach truly lives up to its nickname as the "village of thinkers".

365 Days Alpbach Spirit

As a club board member now, I am already looking forward to another time in Alpbach. Nevertheless, we can and should retain the Alpbach spirit all year long and exchange facts and figures as well as ideas in trying to have a positive impact. Moreover, we can take this year's EFA as inspiration to delve further into the discussed topics. This may include becoming more knowledgeable in finance and the significance of money for a more prosperous and sustainable world. Thereby, we can strengthen the future of the crucial themes finance and economy, security, sustainability, and democracy and the rule of law that EFA revolves around.

'Just a Crush?' by Jure Ivić and Valentina Ostojić

The European Forum Alpbach (EFA) is like a high-speed networking carnival. It brings together people from all walks of life, each eager to connect and make a mark. But here's the question: do these whirlwind encounters at EFA turn into lasting relationships and connections, or do they fizzle out like a one-night stand?

One of the hallmark features of EFA is "speed friending" - a format that encourages quick, energetic exchanges. You meet someone, chat for a few minutes, and then move on to the next. It's like speed dating, but for professional and personal connections. This rapid-fire approach mirrors our fast-paced lives, where everything seems to be about efficiency and results. But does this speed make for shallow interactions, or can it spark something deeper? On the plus side, speed-friending can introduce you to a lot of people in a short time. However, the downside is that these conversations can sometimes stay on the surface. For some, it might feel like they're in a networking race, where the focus shifts from genuine connection to just making a good impression. Yet, not all is lost. Even brief encounters can be the start of something significant. You might meet someone who later becomes a key collaborator, a lifelong friend, or even a romantic interest. So while the initial meeting might be fleeting, the impact can be long-lasting.

To get a better sense of how people experience EFA, we surveyed 49 EFA 2024 participants. Here's what we found: only 16.3% of them consider themselves introverted, 26.5% are extroverted, and the majority - 57.1% - fall somewhere in between. This mix of personalities shows that EFA accommodates various styles of networking. When it comes to where people make the most connections, the survey revealed some interesting patterns. The top spots for forming bonds were Jakober in the evenings (61.2%), seminar sessions (59.2%),

and accommodations (44.9%). It seems that both structured events and informal settings play a role in building relationships. Other activities, like networking events, hikes, and fireside chats, were mentioned too, but less frequently.

Language and cultural background also influence how people connect. Only 8.2% of respondents primarily hung out with others from their own country. Meanwhile, 38.8% spent most of their time with people from their country or those who spoke a similar language. The remaining 53% mingled with a diverse mix of international participants, often communicating in languages other than their native one. This shows that EFA is a melting pot, where connections cross cultural and linguistic barriers.

Beyond these professional connections, our survey also revealed that three-quarters of respondents had at least a slight crush on someone they met at EFA, and for a quarter of them, this interest extended to three or more people. This indicates that EFA not only fosters professional networking but also creates an environment where personal connections can flourish.

Despite the dynamic and engaging interactions during EFA, the challenge often lies in sustaining these connections once the event concludes. The responses show that while the majority of participants (87.7%) had recurring discussions with more than 10 people during EFA, maintaining those connections afterward proved more challenging. Over half (53.1%) stayed in touch with only a few people after the event, despite 51% having engaged with 11-20 individuals and 36.7% with more than 20 during EFA.

But what about those connections? Do they turn into something meaningful? When asked about involvement in initiatives or projects that began at EFA and continued afterward, 42.9% of respondents said they wished they had been involved but weren't. Another 10.2% weren't interested in participating at all. For those who did get involved, some noted that the initial enthusiasm for projects waned once the forum was over.

Respondents expressed a desire for more post-EFA connections. They suggested hosting pop-up events across Europe to keep the EFA spirit alive. To stay connected online, ideas like a social media group, Discord, or Slack channel are popular, along with more Zoom meetups for an international group vibe. A dedicated platform for finding and connecting with other alumni could make it easier to reach out. There's also enthusiasm for mentorship programs, volunteering opportunities, and webinars to foster learning and collaboration. So, is EFA a fleeting affair or a long-term partnership? It turns out to be a bit of both. The rapid connections can lead to significant, enduring relationships if nurtured. EFA offers the chance to meet a lot of people quickly, but it's up to

each participant to keep the conversation going and build on those initial sparks. In the end, it's about how you turn those brief moments into lasting connections that define the experience.

'Alone: A Path to Creativity or a State of Isolation' by Renata
Penchova

What makes you feel alone or isolated? Being alone is often seen through contrasting lenses—some view it as a source of creative inspiration, while others experience it as a heavy burden of isolation.

During a seminar called "Creating an Ensemble," we were posed this question: "What makes you feel alone or isolated?" It clearly struck a chord, as the responses were deeply personal, spanning the spectrum from long-distance relationships to the sense of disconnect in crowded rooms, from the heavy burden of unspoken thoughts to the overwhelming crises of climate change and war. It was a moment of raw honesty, revealing a profound truth: no matter who we are, many of us have felt alone and isolated at some point in our lives. Yet, in that room, we found the courage to share our vulnerability.

Reflecting on the insights from the seminar, I've come to realize how powerful these moments of vulnerability can be when channelled into positive change. The discussions around isolation and our shared experiences reminded me that while loneliness is deeply personal, it's also a collective struggle. It inspired me to think about how I could carry these lessons back to my own community, building spaces where such honest conversations are welcomed. Imagine a network where young people can safely express their feelings, share their stories, and find support among their peers—where the raw honesty we experienced at the seminar becomes a catalyst for deeper connections and mutual understanding.

Considering how things currently play out in the world, it's easy to feel that those in positions of power, who should be uniting us, are instead contributing to our sense of isolation. Too often, leaders seem consumed by their pursuit of

influence, turning a blind eye to the urgent issues that threaten our collective well-being—environmental destruction, wars, and the neglect of future generations. Their lack of empathy only deepens the sense of disconnection many of us already feel.

But perhaps we're looking in the wrong place for solutions. Rather than waiting for leaders to guide us, we can turn to each other. True connection and the power to unite come from within our communities—from spaces where vulnerability is embraced, where we can express our struggles, share our stories, and build something greater together. It is in these smaller, intimate circles that real change begins.

In these challenging times, it's important to remember that it's okay not to be okay. Despite the illusion of constant connection through social media, feelings of isolation are still widespread. This is why mental health awareness is so crucial—it reminds us that we are not alone in our struggles. We must embrace our individuality and reach out to others, creating networks of support where true connection can thrive.

As I look ahead to a post-EFA experience, I am committed to taking these lessons and implementing them in practical ways. I aim to foster environments where young people can voice their challenges, dream big, and feel seen. This journey is not just about tackling isolation but about building a resilient community that thrives on the belief that our shared stories can pave the way for a brighter, more connected future.

Humans aren't simple, but our strength lies in our ability to come together. We must nurture love and empathy, beginning with those closest to us. By working on our emotional intelligence and taking small, meaningful steps in our communities, we can inspire broader change.

Macedonian author Goran Stefanovski once wrote, "All living things are born with a survival instinct... People, in order to survive, weave stories." So, I urge you to start weaving your own story—a story of connection, compassion, and collective action. Together, we have the power to change the world and create a better future. Let's begin that journey now.

'Un tejido a 3 tiempos' by Lucía Z. Serrano Rocabado

Contemplar Alpbach, abrazar los Alpes y perderme en los amarillos del cielo me conecta con el tiempo y con los tejidos de un antes, durante y después de EFA. Son emociones, personas, reflexiones y herramientas que vienen a mi mente y refrescan mi ser.

Desde mi perspectiva, EFA 2024 se siente como un tejido de 3 tiempos o “3 hilos” que habitan en la memoria y en el futuro. El primer hilo representa las expectativas, formadas por las voces de quienes compartieron sus experiencias, la información genérica que encontré en el portal web, y el proceso de postulación en el que cada persona becaria expresó con entusiasmo su deseo de ser seleccionada. Recuerdo haber plasmado una visión híbrida en la solicitud, preguntándome cómo yo, una voz femenina desde los valles bolivianos, podría contribuir y desafiar los espacios europeos. ¿Cómo podría mi participación en EFA 2024 crear un impacto en Europa y en mi país de origen, especialmente dentro de comunidades pequeñas? Aunque ahora resido en Europa, habito dos identidades en movimiento: la primera, boliviana, y la segunda, como migrante navegando en las dinámicas europeas. Es un camino que busca integración, alianzas, ideas, agentes de cambio y oportunidades de Crecimiento.

El segundo hilo: Vivir EFA, tejiendo experiencias, ideas y conexiones, fue un torbellino de emociones e inspiración. La diversidad de personas, historias y contextos —las perspectivas compartidas y contrastantes entre el norte y sur— me ofrecieron una nueva visión. Me dí cuenta de cuántos jóvenes europeos viven día a día en medio de emergencias humanitarias por ejemplo, y cuántas voces más claman por una Europa más sostenible y justa, con una profunda conciencia sobre los problemas globales, especialmente los relacionados con la emergencia climática, que fueron determinantes en mi participación.

Participar en algunos diálogos entre el norte y sur global fue enriquecedor (reconociendo que aún falta fortalecer en EFA mayor participación de voces del sur) , con respuestas que fueron más allá de la simple escucha activa y que ofrecieron verdaderas propuestas de cambio. Recuerdo compartir historias sobre las realidades climáticas indígenas con otros becarios y becarias EFA, y sus respuestas no fueron únicamente empáticas, sino también resilientes y proactivas. En este tejido, las voces de los expertos, ya sea durante un simple, *fireside chat* o una sesión de *food for thought*, fueron alentadoras. Rechazando las normas jerárquicas, discutimos de manera horizontal; escuchando nuestras historias, proyecciones, compartiendo las suyas y juntos diseñamos estrategias para nuestro camino hacia el cambio, formando alianzas a través de nuestras diferencias de intereses, experiencias de vida y perspectivas.

El tercer hilo, que es el más delgado pero de gran extensión, construido en un tercer tiempo, llena mis ojos de brillo entre la combinación de sueños, ilusiones, esperanza y la energía del diálogo. Para mí, el EFA significa replicar lo que he aprendido y vivido, llevándolo a comunidades vulnerables en el sur global, a líderes jóvenes, pueblos indígenas y mujeres que luchan por un mundo más sostenible y justo. Concretamente, mi visión es construir puentes de diálogo entre los becarios de EFA y los jóvenes tanto del norte como del sur Global, ampliando el círculo de colaboración. En EFA, reflexionamos sobre temas globales urgentes que deben llegar a más jóvenes y nuevos grupos. Las alianzas entre universidades, centros de investigación y activistas juveniles de ambas regiones son la brújula para lograr un impulso colectivo frente a las crisis globales existentes. Los patrocinadores y mentores involucrados en las iniciativas del EFA juegan un papel fundamental en este esfuerzo, contribuyendo a la búsqueda de soluciones, alternativas óptimas para los cuatro ejes temáticos de EFA.

Democracia, Cambio Climático, Seguridad, Economía y Finanzas en Europa se sostienen a través de un intercambio colectivo que genera unidad. Citando las palabras de *Andreas Treichl*: “La Prosperidad, unidad y paz se alcanzan si trabajamos en una comunidad de democracia, estado de Derecho y protección de derechos humanos.” Para mí, esto se materializa a través de un diálogo recíproco entre jóvenes del sur y norte global en la búsqueda de justicia y responsabilidad compartida.

El momento de la verdad radica en formar estas alianzas, visibilizar al otro y crear iniciativas que puedan replicarse en nuestros espacios. A través de nuestras diferencias y contextos diversos, podemos repensar los impactos globales que posicionen a Europa de una manera más dinámica e inclusiva. La fuerza de

diferentes comunidades, con sus costumbres, conocimientos y sabidurías únicas, constituyen las semillas que comenzamos a germinar en EFA, y que esperamos esparcir por el mundo, desde el norte hasta el sur.

A 3 stroke weaving

Contemplating Alpbach, embracing the Alps, and getting lost in the yellows of the sky connect me with time and with the fabrics of a before, during and post-EFA. These are emotions, people, reflections, and tools that come to my mind and refresh my being.

From my point of view, EFA 2024 feels like a weaving of “3 threads” that dwell in memory and in the future. The first thread represents expectations—formed from the voices of those who shared their experiences, the generic information found on the web portal, and the application process through which every scholarship recipient eagerly expressed their desire to be chosen. I remember capturing a hybrid vision in that application, questioning how I, a feminine voice from the Bolivian valleys, could contribute to and challenge European spaces. How could my participation in EFA 2024 create an impact in Europe and in my home country, particularly within small communities? While I now reside in Europe, I inhabit two dynamic identities: the first, Bolivian, and the second, a migrant navigating European dynamics. It’s a path that seeks integration, alliances, ideas, agents of change, and opportunities for growth.

The second thread: Living EFA, weaving together experiences, ideas, and connections, was a whirlwind of emotions and inspiration. The diversity of people, stories, and backgrounds—the shared and contrasting perspectives from the European and the South—offered me a new lens. I realized how many young Europeans live day to day amidst humanitarian emergencies, for example, and how many more voices cry out for a better Europe, with a deep awareness of global issues, particularly the climate emergency, which was central to my participation.

Engaging in dialogues between the Global North and South was enriching, with responses that went beyond active listening to real proposals for change. I recall sharing stories about indigenous climate realities with EFA peers, and their responses were not just empathetic but filled with actionable ideas. In this weaving, the voices of experts, whether over a simple lunch, a Fireside Chat, or a Food for Thought session, were encouraging. Rejecting hierarchical norms, we discussed in a horizontal way; they listened to our stories, shared their own, and together we designed strategies for our path of change, forming alliances through differences in interests, life experiences, and perspectives.

The third thread, which is the thinnest, but of great extension, built in a third time, fills my eyes with brightness among the combination of dreams, illusions, hope, and the energy of dialogue. For me, EFA means replicating what I have learned and experienced, bringing it to vulnerable communities in the Global South, to young leaders, indigenous peoples, and women striving for a more sustainable and just world. Concretely, my vision is to build bridges of dialogue between EFA scholarship holders and young people from both the Global North and South, expanding the circle of collaboration. At EFA, we reflect on urgent global issues that must reach more young people and new groups. Alliances between universities, research centers, and youth activists from both regions are the compass for achieving a collective push against existing global crises. The people involved in EFA’s initiatives play a critical role in this effort, contributing to the search for optimal alternative solutions to the four thematic tracks of EFA.

Democracy, Climate Change, Security, Finance & Economy in Europe are sustained through a collective exchange that draws unity. To quote the words of Andreas Treichl: “Prosperity, unity and peace are achieved if we work in a community of democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights.” For me, this is realized through reciprocal dialogue between young people from the Global South and North, united in the pursuit of justice and shared responsibility.

The moment of truth lies in forming these alliances, to make the other visible, and in creating initiatives that can be replicated in our spaces. Through our differences and diverse contexts, we can rethink global impacts that position Europe in a more dynamic and inclusive light. The strength of different communities, with their unique customs, knowledge and wisdom, constitutes the seeds we began to germinate at EFA, which we hope to spread across the globe from North to South.

'Tin foil paper ballerinas' by Marina Vanni

“We need to make a business out of this,” Gerhard tells me as I show him how to make tiny ballet dancers out of aluminum paper. Denise agrees; they are both fascinated by this improvised arts and crafts workshop.

Who would have thought this strange bridge between Argentina and Austria would be built: the tin foil ballerinas that my mother taught me how to make as a child, no longer made from *alfajor* cookie paper, but from the wrappers of *Mozart Kugeln* chocolates. I think about how I ended up in the Alps, drinking traditional *mate* with my Austrian friends on a lazy Sunday afternoon like I would have done in Buenos Aires.

I met Gerhard, virtually at least, in 2020. We were supposed to go to Alpbach that year, but a now-forgotten virus left us trapped at home. We kept in touch since, with him and the “Eternal Scholars”—the WhatsApp group of participants who experienced the European Forum Alpbach from the computer screen.

Gerhard, Denise, and I decided to stay longer in Alpbach after the conference. Earlier that day, they were off to hike up the Gratspitz. I needed to rest.

Alone in the flat, I called my mom on the phone. Again she complained about my relatives, the high prices, the government, the housework, the loneliness. She doesn’t have a lot of patience these days, the patience she once summoned to teach me the art of ballerinas. Argentina seems to me an increasingly bizarre and distant place, a lost spot in the south of the south, a run-down paradise that is still home, but that little by little ceases to belong to me.

And so I moved to Berlin, although it wasn’t exactly planned. The crisis hit my

land and my job, and, with nothing else to lose, a travel adventure seemed like the most sensible thing to do. After living in the suburban *barrio* for 28 years, I packed a carry-on suitcase, a backpack, got my camera ready and took off to budget-friendly Turkey with no return ticket. I found out later I could have free accommodation in Berlin while taking care of pets, so I just landed there. A good chance to practice my German, I thought.

Katherina, whom I also knew thanks to that one virtual edition of the Forum, hosted me on my first night in the new city. That was also the first time we met in person.

As with Gerhard, Kathe and I always supported each other despite the distance. We used to discuss the challenges of Germany. She, as a Colombian, faced more than one nightmare at the *Ausländerbehörde*, the Foreign Office. I, with the privilege of dual citizenship and a Spanish passport, had it much easier.

The storm passed for both of us, and life found us resting on the shores of Flughafen See, enjoying the lake breeze. We couldn’t get cold bottles of *Radler*, so we drank *Limonade* instead and pondered the advantages of taking out a *Rechtsschutzversicherung*, a legal insurance. Integration can look funny sometimes.

We always talk about these matters: our roots and our fears, the duality of being a migrant, to miss and not to miss our birthplace, belonging here and there at the same time, expressing thoughts in German and emotions in Spanish.

It was getting dark at the lake, the heat subsiding, and we lost track of time in conversation. I tried to get her excited about the idea of us going to Alpbach together in the future. “They need people like us, like you. There is a lack of Latino perspectives. We gotta burst the European bubble,” I told her.

That was my feeling, at least, when I had to speak on the big stage at the Forum. The EFA staff pulled strings in a very clever plot and put my unknown, irrelevant name on a panel with all the important politicians. I said something that to me is common sense and to those present was apparently groundbreaking: we, the Global South, are not the rest of the world, but the majority of the world. A former German vice chancellor enjoyed my little speech and reserved a seat for me at the high-level dinner hosted afterwards. An American Nobel laureate liked that I spoke about inequality, one of his predilect topics. The Southern Hemisphere seed had been planted. My work was done.

As I told this story to Kathe, she seemed more convinced of coming to Alpbach. I am also trying to convince Katharina (with an A, not with E) of joining, but with different arguments.

Katharina-with-an-A is German. She writes novels and quit her job to travel around Australia and New Zealand. Same chronology as with the others: EFA 2020, then messaging for years, then Berlin, then brunch outings in the hip neighborhoods and an *Einweihungsparty*, a housewarming party, when she moved into her own flat.

We recently went to my friends' variety and burlesque show (these are the actor friends who adopted me into their all-German *Stammtisch*, another example of unexpected integration). I said to her, "Katha, I beg you, apply for EFA next year." I told her that this way she would collect endless ideas for writing, with art workshops, nature walks, and the best evening conversations at the bar; everything that makes creative souls like ours happy.

When we first met, Katharina and I chatted in English, but since I decided to stay in Germany, we switched languages. "*Ich muss üben*" ("I need to practice"), I always repeat to her and to myself. I asked Gerhard the same favor. *Ich muss üben, ich muss üben, ich muss üben*, like a hammer incessantly hitting my head. *Ich muss üben*, as if that mantra would erase the lurking insecurity in the chest, the feeling that I will never truly make it here unless I master this foreign tongue to the level of perfection.

A lie, in short. For Kathe and me, the mountain sometimes seems too high to climb, hardly realizing we are already up there.

"Verstehen Sie alles, was ich sage?" ("Do you understand everything I say?") asks Galinde, the talkative landlady who is hosting Gerhard, Denise and me, in her strong Tyrolean accent. "*Neunzig Prozent*" (90%), I reply, and she laughs.

The tiny foil ballerinas are lying on the table in our apartment, neatly arranged in a row after the photo we took of them. The *mate* cup and its metal straw rest empty after several rounds passing from hand to hand. Everything is set for our return trip.

Gerhard finalizes his marketing plan to publicize the paper ballet dancers and make them part of a seminar for next year's Forum. Denise, before leaving, unknowingly builds a bridge with her goodbye hug and her sweet farewell words:

"Whenever I eat a *Mozart Kugeln*, I will think of you."

'Framing the Future' by Colas van Moorsel

As a climate justice activist and professor of communication, I often find myself reflecting on the power of narratives in shaping our understanding of the world. This was particularly palpable during my experience at the European Forum Alpbach, an annual gathering that draws together thinkers, activists, and innovators from around the globe. Attending this forum for two transformative (and sleep-deprived) weeks was both inspiring and overwhelming, offering me a flood of ideas, conversations, and insights that I'm still working to process, including how many vitamins I should be taking.

The sheer volume of intellectual exchange was, at times, daunting. It was not just about absorbing information but also navigating the pressure we often feel to extract immediate value from every experience—whether in the form of new partnerships, actionable projects, or, in the context of our current economic mindset, something that yields measurable output. However, I soon realized that this forum offered something more valuable than a transactional opportunity: it provided a space for reflection, connection, and the reshaping of narratives.

The days were filled with seminars, workshops, and networking opportunities, blending academic rigor with cultural engagement. We explored the intersections of climate justice, human rights, and democracy, and yet it was the informal moments—conversations over coffee, late-night discussions—that often left the most lasting impressions. Sure, I won't see my new friend from Brazil again next week, but encounters like this reinforced something crucial: real change happens not just through institutions but through relationships, collaboration, and the building of trust across borders.

Yet, as enriching as the forum was, it also illuminated some glaring

gaps. Despite being a platform that prides itself on inclusion and forward-thinking discourse, there was a noticeable lack of representation from the Global South — particularly among youth. This absence is deeply concerning, especially in a forum that seeks to address global challenges like climate change, where the voices most affected by these issues must be heard. Equally troubling was the reluctance to engage with ongoing political conflicts, such as the situation in Palestine. These silences underscored the limitations of even the most progressive spaces when it comes to confronting uncomfortable truths. That said, EFA remains one of the best platforms for young people to network and drive meaningful change.

The forum's strength lies in its openness to interdisciplinary approaches. It was refreshing to see art and culture integrated alongside scientific and policy discussions. Too often, climate conferences focus narrowly on data and technological solutions, neglecting the emotional and cultural dimensions of our relationship with the planet. The inclusion of artists and storytellers added a necessary layer to the dialogue, reminding us that facts alone are insufficient to inspire the deep systemic changes we need. We must also reimagine the stories we tell about our future.

This brings me to the heart of my work: communication. In my experience as an activist and educator, I have come to believe that one of the most profound levers for change lies in how we frame our narratives. The climate crisis is, at its core, a communication crisis. We are not only grappling with scientific and technological challenges but also with the limitations of our collective imagination.

At the forum, this realization was reinforced through conversations with leading figures such as Ian Goldin, Melissa Fleming, and Luisa Neubauer. Despite their diverse backgrounds — spanning academia, diplomacy, and activism — they all emphasized the centrality of communication in driving systemic change. Their work highlights a critical truth: if we are to address the complex, interwoven crises of our time — climate, inequality, and democracy — we must first address the stories we tell ourselves and each other.

As I returned to my classroom in Belgium, I felt a renewed sense of urgency. Teaching climate education is not merely imparting knowledge; it's about empowering the next generation to question, to challenge, and to create new narratives that push beyond the status quo. It's about fostering a sense of agency in students, so they understand that they are not passive observers of the climate crisis but active participants in shaping its outcomes.

Looking ahead, the task before us is monumental. We are simultaneously grappling with the most complex problems of the century while

navigating a world in rapid transition — whether through technological advancements, shifts in education, or the increasing frequency of climate disasters (read “21 Lessons for the 21st Century”). The future is uncertain, and yet, it is precisely this uncertainty that calls for bold, action-driven optimism.

I left the European Forum Alpbach with a deepened commitment to my work. The conversations I had, the ideas I encountered, and the friendships I formed have reinforced my belief that we are capable of transforming society into one that is more just, sustainable, and resilient. But this transformation will not happen through hope alone. It will require action — decisive, collaborative action that transcends borders and generations.

Now, more than ever, we must rise to the occasion. The time has come for citizens of Europe, and indeed the world, to step up. The climate crisis is not a future event; it is here, now, and it demands our collective effort. By shifting the narrative from one of despair to one of opportunity, we can harness the power of communication to drive meaningful change. This is our moment to create a legacy for future generations, and I believe we are up to the task.

The path forward may be daunting, but I remain hopeful. Not because the challenges we face are small, but because I have seen the potential for change in the passion, creativity, and resilience of those I met at the European Forum Alpbach. Together, we can build a future where justice, sustainability, and solidarity are not just ideals, but realities.

'A Modern Grammar Lesson in Empathetic Language' by Cass McLaughlin

“The word grammar derived from the Greek word ‘grammatika’ means the art of writing. Grammar can be defined as a language user’s subconscious internal system. It is the mental system of rules and categories that allows humans to form and interpret the words and sentences of their language.” (Dawit)

Yet, no language truly operates by rigid rules. Instead, grammar functions as the weaving that creates the fabric of communication. It evolves, shaped by context, discourse, and communicative awareness, embodying a dynamic interplay of morphology and syntax. The forms of words and their ordering work together to convey meaning that transcends boundaries and which adapts to cultural and social shifts. Grammar, then, is less about prescription and more about connection—a tool for crafting relationships through language.

When viewed through an empathetic lens, grammar becomes a profound medium for understanding and connection. Colwyn Trevarthen’s concept of Dynamic Emotional Syntax (DES) underscores this perspective. He describes grammar as intrinsically tied to human intersubjectivity—the rhythms of shared emotions and intentions that emerge as we interact. From infancy, these rhythms help us interpret intentions, express feelings, and build connections. In this framework, grammar is more than technical; it’s visceral, rooted in our need for mutual understanding and belonging.

Traditional approaches to grammar often focus on fixed structures: subject-verb-object, complements, and adverbials. These frameworks, while useful, only scratch the surface of how language operates. Grammar is inherently contextual, blending form, meaning, and discourse. In social

contexts, it reflects purpose and relationships, adapting to semantics and the flow of information.

Trevarthen’s insights bridge traditional grammar with empathy, revealing how the rhythmic forms of shared emotionality underpin our ability to communicate. When we mirror others’ linguistic rhythms or paraphrase their words, we foster understanding. This dynamic exchange mirrors the weaving of grammar itself: flexible, responsive, and deeply human.

Empathy relies on the integration of multiple communication channels: facial expressions, prosody, and speech content. Omitting one of these can diminish the effectiveness of emotional understanding, as studies show (Trevarthen, 2011). Empathetic communication, then, is holistic. It requires us to listen not merely to respond but to truly understand. When empathy ruptures, conversational violence—verbal aggression, withdrawal, or miscommunication—often follows. These breaks highlight the necessity of nurturing empathy through language, ensuring our words foster connection rather than division.

Stephen King aptly described writing as telepathy—a pure distillation of art’s ability to connect minds. Compassion in writing demands we step into the reader’s shoes, crafting material that is factual, nuanced, and respectful. This practice extends beyond grammar into tone, word choice, and intention.

For instance, the conscious use of pronouns exemplifies the life-affirming power of language. Recognizing and respecting pronouns isn’t merely a grammatical detail; it’s an affirmation of identity, a gesture that signals care and understanding. Such practices highlight the ethical dimensions of language, emphasizing the writer’s role in creating inclusive and empathetic spaces.

During my workshop ‘A Modern Grammar Lesson in Empathetic Language’, participants explored the power of personal narratives through guided exercises. Prompted to write about their origins and challenges, they shared their stories in small groups, breaking through barriers of vulnerability. This exercise underscored a profound truth: sharing personal narratives translates directly into community care. Empathy emerged not as an abstract ideal but as a tangible, transformative force.

Such storytelling has applications far beyond creative exercises. In policy writing, healthcare, and academic research, empathetic language is essential in fostering understanding and building trust, not to mention establishing credibility. Conscious communication effectively bridges divides in crucial spaces where diverse voices need to be heard, valued and amplified.

In a world marked by sensitivity and vulnerability, the language we

choose matters profoundly. By embracing empathy as a foundational principle in communication, we can create environments where everyone feels seen, heard, and respected. This responsibility extends to future generations, challenging us to cultivate safe spaces for authentic expression and coexistence.

Grammar, then, is not merely an art of writing; it's an art of living—a dynamic, empathetic practice that shapes the very fabric of human connectivity.

POETRY & PROSE

'Buenas Vistas' by Cass McLaughlin

Scene 1

our proteges impress me from day one, opening themselves up
to the confusing world of emotions and vulnerability. I take them down
into the forest for a little treat, an hour of peace with the river, soothed
by the photosynthesizing moss and trees
they write poetry while I watch bumblebees collect nectar
from the splashes of pink in the forest greens
droplets of rain build up on the petals, flashing
a flimmery twinkle to the eye who beholds
pockets of flat grass with fruit trees provide an orchard
for happy sheep to graze as they please, their *baas*
mixing together and I know they've having just as much fun as we are
they run in small herds and I can't help but chuckle at the
sight of it. this must be what we look like to those who call
Alpbach home. for two weeks we've turned this mountain town
into an international village. no matter our mother tongue, we play
just the same; volleyball, music, charades, what are we now? that's
for us to figure out when we go our separate ways and return to our homes.'

Scene 2.1

kind eyes, kindred hearts, king shit.
picking plums and apples off the late summer trees
our toes getting tanned, they warned us
these weeks would be what we made of it
and today we made time for fun

Scene 2.2

The river runs cold, numbing my submerged feet.
New friends wonder how i'm able to skip over the stones with grace
These pads are well-weathered, adverse to the terrain of a creek,
It's a game of balance, much like the stacking of rocks
Providing an art of stillness amidst a gushing flow
We are pouring ourselves into this, I think.

Scene 3

Where mountaintop horizons touch the skyline
pale pink clouds sift slowly kissing rains
a portal of blue remains open,
giving a peak at daylight from a different scene
a flock of birds play-dance in circles,
like shadows cast over sheets of gray.
I'm staring out the bus window now,
mesmerized by the orange glow street lantern
my attention darts back to the fog descending,
churning in the evening.

In the morning here silent rituals, tonight is lo-fi tapes in this sacred space,
donned in velvet drapery, gold lanterns, and jeweled chalices,
illuminated by a sparkling violet low-light
a myriad of melodies splashing like watercolor,
in shades of the wind, gusts breezing through the pipes of a flute.
angelic melodies sung, breathing into the walls,
spoken word reverberating all throughout the cathedral.

My overnight pack filled with the essentials to tackle the
sunrise hike I never made it to
the chill of the night took me into the warm embrace of familiars,
this is what I was after, anyway
hopefully next year Gratspitz is still there waiting for me
to make the ascent.

'Wednesday' by Charley Lane-McElroy

the top of your spine
your head, the crown
shivers
like how you imagine cats feel
when they beg for pets
and then get them.

eyes, milk-eyes in their
milk sockets.
a day.
a day done,
wearily

and the weight of every
hundredth half-formed thought
almost-thought.

you cannot seem to wrap your
milk-curdled, ink-thick brain -
with its eyes, milk-eyes -
around the mountains

the scale and beauty
and ambivalence of them
you wonder if to the gods,
they feel like braille.

'The Stream is Louder' by Lucy English

The stream is louder than a car.
The pine tree's taller than a house.
The mud smells stronger than my sweat.
The mountain's taller than the church.
The sky is bluer than your eyes.
The balsam's tall as your child.
The blackberries have now all gone.
The stream is louder than an axe.
The leaves are greener than the street.
The cars haven't gone away
but the sky's as blue as happiness;
the stream's as restless as my heart.
The shade's as welcome as my home.

'The Slowest Hiker in Alpbach' by Sam Deddeh

Up ahead they're looking back,
The gap between us steadily grows.
"I really love to hike," I say.
"It's just that I'm extremely slow."

At nine I started chasing peaks,
From meadow hills to mountaintops.
I'd bring my toes up to the edge,
Unconcerned about the drop.

After a few slips and falls,
Carefree courage starts to break.
Bites and stings and bloody knees,
Initiate a change of pace.

Up I go with measured steps,
Careful, testing every rock.
And so I sometimes miss the rest,
Fading past me as I walk.

Flowers blooming, soft and sweet.
Surely each is worth a stop.
But what if when I close my eyes,
My nose meets a wayward wasp?

Some will venture off the path,
Where the grass grows tall and thick.
I might like to sit a while,

If not for the risk of ticks.

A bubbling stream tempts my thirst,
Do I dare to take a sip?
Nah. No spring is purer than,
The parasite that'd pass my lips.

Even so, I carry on.
The summit is a holy grail.
I do appreciate the view,
From the safety of the trail.

Nowadays I'm not so brave,
Yet younger me would adore,
That here I am still chasing peaks,
Each higher than the one before.

'Kaffee und Kuchen im Dorf' by Lisa Settari

Es riecht immer gleich, wenn sie die Tür hinter mir zumacht. Auch die ersten paar Sätze sind immer gleich, aber es macht mir nichts aus, hier nicht. Es ist, als würden wir miteinander ein altes Wiegenlied singen. Wir gehen in die Küche, weg vom Zeremoniell der Stube. Da steht ein alter Gasherd. Das Mittagsgeschirr ist schon gespült und tropft ab. Es ist Frühherbst, alles kommt etwas zur Ruhe. Aber die Sonne strahlt noch herein, durch die Vorhänge mit den orangen, braunen und rosa Blümchen. Die Tischdecke ist weiß. Hier klingen die Geräusche der Welt draußen nur dumpf herein. Umso besser hört man, wie der Kaffee zu blubbern anfängt. Auf dem Tisch warten ein Rechteck Apfelkuchen und gekaufte Kekse, die kann man besser tunken

Ich setze mich, greife nach einem Keks, sie schenkt uns ein. Ich schaue zum tausendsten Mal auf das schwarzweiße Foto im Winkel und merke es kaum. „Jeden Tag so eine Frisur drehen, da müsste ich ja noch früher aufstehen“, schmunzle ich, auch nicht zum ersten Mal. „Das zahlt sich ja nie aus, da schläfst du besser länger. Aber es ist schon gegangen, damals, für uns. Ich hab' schon ausgeholfen, beim Zopfen und Drehen“, sagt sie, als sie die Milch aus dem Kühlschrank holt. „Du hattest auch solche Frisuren, oder?“ „Ja, ja, auch. Wir haben uns ausgeholfen. War schön, da waren wir beieinander. Sonst konnte man sich ja nicht einfach streicheln, weißt ja.“ „Aber beim Frisieren hat's keiner gemerkt?“ Die grauen Augen blitzen, ihre Stimme wird hell, darauf freue ich mich immer. „Da hat's keiner gemerkt.“ Sie schneidet den Kuchen an. „Zumindest hat niemand was gesagt.“

Wir reden über die Kleiderordnung in der Volksschule, die Modegeschäfte von damals, und über den Apfelkuchen, der auf dem Blech dahinschrumpft. Dann wieder über die kunstvollen Flechtfrisuren und über das Frisieren. „Ich bin so froh, dass das besser geworden ist. Stell dir vor, heute können sie ja Hand in

Hand durchs Dorf spazieren.“ Ich schaue auf die Tischdecke, streiche mit zwei Fingern darüber, obwohl ich das Gefühl nicht mag.

Ich sage nichts, denke an die Leserbriefe, Videos von Tradwives, Wahlplakate, will sie aber nicht belasten damit. Aber wir haben schon zu oft die gleichen Sätze gewechselt, sie weiß schon Bescheid. Bitte, als müsste ich sie vor der Wirklichkeit schützen. Ich sage nichts, schaue aus dem Fenster und sehe, dass uns eine graue Decke die Sicht abgedunkelt hat. Sie wischt ein paar Brösel vom Tischtuch auf ihre Handfläche und lässt, wie üblich, keine Zweifel zu: „Wirst sehen, das wird noch besser, das geht immer weiter. Wart nur.“

Coffee and Cake in the Village

It always smells the same when she closes the door behind me. The first few sentences are always the same, but I don't mind it here. It's as if we're singing an old lullaby together. We go into the kitchen, away from the ceremony of the parlor. There stands an old gas stove. The lunch dishes have already been washed and are dripping dry. It's early autumn, and everything is settling down a bit. But the sun still shines in through the curtains with orange, brown, and pink flowers. The tablecloth is white. Here, the sounds of the world outside come in only muffled. You can hear all the better how the coffee begins to bubble. On the table wait a rectangular apple cake and store-bought cookies, which are better for dunking.

I sit down, reach for a cookie, and she pours us some coffee. For the thousandth time, I glance at the black-and-white photo in the corner and barely notice it. “To style such a hairstyle every day, I'd have to get up even earlier,” I chuckle, also not for the first time. “It's never worth it; you're better off sleeping longer. But it worked back then, for us. I used to help with the braiding and twisting,” she says as she takes the milk out of the fridge. “You had hairstyles like that too, right?” “Yes, yes, I did. We helped each other. It was nice; we were together. Otherwise, you couldn't just cuddle, you know.” “But no one noticed while you were doing hair?” Her gray eyes sparkle, her voice brightens, and I always look forward to that. “No one noticed.” She cuts the cake. “At least no one said anything.”

We talk about the dress code in primary school, the fashion stores of that time, and the apple cake that's shrinking on the baking sheet. Then we return to the elaborate braided hairstyles and hairdressing. “I'm so glad that's improved. Can you imagine? Today, they can walk hand in hand through the village.” I look at the tablecloth, running my fingers over it, though I don't like the feeling.

I say nothing, thinking of the letters to the editor, videos of tradwives, campaign posters, but I don't want to burden her with that. We've exchanged the same

sentences too often; she already knows. It's as if I have to protect her from reality. I say nothing, look out the window, and see that a gray blanket has darkened our view. She brushes a few crumbs from the tablecloth onto her palm and, as usual, leaves no room for doubt: “You'll see, it's going to get even better; it always goes on. Just wait.”

'writer' by Anna Bauer

I: there are little hills, fading into a green, lush forest, black pavement weaving through the landscape, next to fields full of corn and wheat and rapeseed.

II: i am a writer, i say, sometimes. i got more hesitant over the years, my voice slowly fading. i am writer, i am writer, i am writer. but the truth feels more like: I am a liar. I am a liar. I am a liar.

III: they are building a bridge in the forest, over the hills, bulldozing trees, building and building and building. we are driving slowly now, down the hills through the woods, along the fields full of wheat and corn and rapeseed. there's always been a bridge, as long as I remember, but things don't grow old, not even here.

IV: you have a talent for writing stories, they told me. I was inclined to believe them. I am not sure when I stopped writing every day, starting to believe doubt rather than hope. I was not born a writer and there are days and weeks and months where I am not sure if I will die as a writer.

V: in my village you can hear the sound of the trees moving and cracking in the wind. the birds singing, the crickets chirping. it's not silent there at night, the sheep over the street are bleating and the crickets, as it seems, never go to sleep, never fall silent. in my village you can hear the sound of the cars, driving along the black highway over the old bridge, over the hills. the steady roar of their engines, the silent drum of their wheels. it's not silent there at night either, the cars never stop driving, the people never stop moving.

'Rest' by Susanne Roberts

Time is unrelenting in Alpbach.

A million little moments,

and a million gargantuan ones:

food with a stranger,

a moving speech,

a half drunken debate late at night,

raucous cheering,

consoling a friend,

feeling your horizons expand,

writing a poem.

The sun—a daily reminder of the inevitable end of these two weeks.

Absorb. Think. Rest.

Eat. Absorb. Think.

You don't have time to Rest.

Feel. Connect. Learn.

Your life will be changed.
Don't rest.
You can't, even when they tell you to.

Experience your moment of truth.
That's vague on purpose.
What truth? Whose truth?
Truth. Truth. Truth.
Who gets to decide?
Me? Me of all people?
You?

The time passes.
A week is over.

Is my life changed?
Maybe.

Did I have time for Truth?
Learn. Connect. Feel.
Initiate. Participate.
Find your Truth!

Maybe I'll find it when I have time to Sleep.

'Inspiration' by Lucy English

Another day of patchy rain.
I can't see the mountain peaks;
the clouds are falling down the slopes.

I'm by the window in the Conference foyer.
They are all still in a session.
Shh. Don't talk too loud.
Shh. Don't talk too loud,
says each footstep on the marble floor.

I have forgotten the names of everyone
I met over the last few days.

Except for Katya, who wore such a crisp white shirt
and gorgeous red lipstick. She was so serious.
'When are you an inspiration to others?'
I didn't say.
We were in a session called, 'How not to be Perfect'.

My concentration slips down further than the clouds.
I wish my brain was organised like Katya's.
And yes, Lando's, who runs a Start Up and is not yet thirty.
He said, 'I think you need that coffee.'

All the things I could have done but didn't.
I spilled the coffee down my dress
and had to rinse it in the Ladies.
I forget to Network. I forget to thank Lando.

So, now I'm here in the foyer.
The clouds roll down the hills
like dragon's breath.
And the magic lakes of sun
come and go.
Come and go.

~~HumanConnectivity~~ by Cass McLaughlin & Isio Ighofose

Even in a crowded room, it's easy to feel alone.
The world's safety an illusion, tethered to fragile ego.
Deep dives into psyche reveal, tendencies to grasp or numb
the things which make us shed a tear, it's up to you to swim or run.
Young look to the elder, for some sensibility,
but move through time, and you shall see.
The same glass cloud, fogs all great minds
No less a coward, and no more wise.
A friend is someone you can ask if they're feeling the same way
And it doesn't matter what they say; Yes or no, it's all the same.
But they're there, holding you close, through endless cycles of change,
unexpectedly becoming dear like family at some point along the way.
How do you transform and remain the same?
We reshape, rearrange, atoms into the same
vessel you were born into. And how long does that take?
Lifetimes. How long do we have? As long as we make haste.

Will we still recognize ourselves when we look into each other's eyes?
With certainty; the remembrance is a feeling of the most high.
Where? Flutters in the heart, tingling in the toes and fingertips.
Deep beating in the chest. How the hairs stand up on your arm.
The fit of wriggling emotions, like eels in the stomach—
slippery, slimy, squirmy, wormy, wiggly, sometimes in an uncomfortable way.
In the same way that you transform, so do they.
Like butterflies, we metamorphosize
in a weird cocoon, eager to burst forth anew
Hanging from the branch of a tree,
ready to fly away, spreading wings,
sharing colors with the wind.
The wind passes messages to all ears open—
Are you listening? Yes, with lingering uncertainty. And, I think I heard you.
When? Always, but it took a long time to find you, and I'm still not sure, but I
believe you're true.
Trust yourself. Trust a friend. Trust fall, trust fall.
Open up and begin. It will be worth it after all.
We find ourselves in others, the way we rest on earth, grounded by the pull of
gravity.
Trusting in the cycle of lifting each other up, that is human connectivity.
Like the Reaper's sickle, we are blades of grass, emerging from the darkness.
And with a swing, we all fall down, making way for new growth in the mess.
Everything begins anew,
As the cycle does continue.
How lucky am I to have a friend in you?
Not as lucky as I am to have you.

Thank you. I love you.

I love you, too.

'Captaining' by Lisa Settari

“These things are complicated,”

they say.

complex

difficult

tricky

the numbers,

the interests,

the routes,

the rising numbers,

the re-articulated interests,

the newly found routes.

People have always wandered.

“But not like this!”

“And what about our treasures here?”

“There are just too many of them!”

Too many?

I listened to one of them,

to his entire, long story.

I thought I knew,

yet I was shaken.

I was shaking.

the shaking made some things

fall into place.

There was the map

and I could see

what I would

want to do:

land on an island

with lakes and rivers,

trees and white sand.

I will invite them all,

each one will have

their own room

and we will all meet on the patio

and share rice, beans and leaves.

There will be books,

there will be writing paper,

and rakes,

so we can continue to grow

rice, beans and leaves
together.

They will not miss a thing,
Except for their mothers.

'The Last Word' by Sam Deddeh

I always win “Two Truths and a Lie.”
American born and raised, but you’ll never guess from where my people came.
Iraq. Shocked?
To be specific, we’re indigenous. Assyrian’s the ethnicity, Chaldean the religion.
Diaspora has spread us wide because many have tried to eradicate us with
genocide.
In between – persecution, killings and fines.

I’m second-generation of a people with no nation. We were forgotten during
self-determination. What even remains of our Nineveh Plains? The willing ran
to invade, helped topple Saddam, which was long overdue. Why then did they
bomb our cities to ruins? Leaving a void, Al Qaeda swept through and
destroyed. And we hid, paranoid, praying we’d escape their next raid.

My white skin is a privilege and a disguise. Silent, I hide, hearing classmates
decide how they would fix Iraq. Nuke it. Turn it into a parking lot.

Two decades later I thought we’d learned. Still people insist we deserved pillage
and rape and Abu Ghraib, claiming we were behind those infamous planes. A
lie proven wrong, but they’ve all moved on without dwelling long on the harm
that it caused.

Sentenced for crimes we did not commit. Some destroy our culture, some
suppress it. We took up arms, sounded the alarm at the sign they put on our
doors for the world to ignore what’s happening again that’s happened before.

Caught between two sides. Purists deride that I don’t speak a language that died
or live in a land where my people barely survive. I must testify why I identify.

They set their price, this percentage would suffice when ISIS wouldn't think twice if it was one or ninety-five.

Then the country that can never truly be mine because there's a line. Decades of assimilation, yet they always remind us who we are in their eyes. Primitive monkeys, criminal masterminds. My cousins fled for their lives, called terrorists, when they were terrorized.

Accused that if we go back we'll attack or displace. Not the case. There's no list of demands. I'll never see my people's homeland. Our treasures that weren't blown into sand deemed too precious to stay in our hands.

Tell our whole story? I don't have the words. Pages torn out, redacted, or burned. Piecing together a shattered mosaic, slivers of English, Arabic, Aramaic.

We persist, more than this, we must reach excellence. Earn our new countries' conditional acceptance. Here I stand, wonder if it's in vain? Will you see me as more than our trauma and pain? Give us a space for Assyrian joy, Assyrian stories told in our voice. We're here to share, if you dare, and beware of what you've heard. You want the truth? Let us have the last word.

'The Moment of Action' by Andrea Veselá

Hope is air and air is hope
And I fear we are running out of both.

Look at the bright side of things
Life is so beautiful
Here, for us
Tainted with a bitter aftertaste of unjust privilege and inequity.

I start writing these words amidst mountain peaks
and finish them by the sea
A sea that flows into another that flows into an ocean
Which floods homes and drowns lives elsewhere
The same sea that is becoming a graveyard
Because some of us feel entitled to a land
That is here for all.

Desensitisation, dissonance, denial, destruction.

While bombs destroy lives, families, communities, a heritage, a people
While millions are displaced
Palestine, Sudan, DRC, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and others cry
And we put in earplugs and look the other way
Sparing a quick glance and a kind word to Ukraine
(because of their proximity and the colour of their skin?)
but even there not for too long
"Of course it is sad, but what is there to do? These are all complex situations."
Fuck that.
There's everything to do and nothing is complex when one human feels

superior and entitled to take another's life.

We are so lucky here
Living in a world built from pompous props
Promised prosperity, comfort and safety
While a husband kills his wife
A girl leaves a party and never makes it home
(But how short was her skirt??)
Violence on women and queer people a building block of our civilised,
developed world
"Feminists these days make such a big deal about everything."
The only time we care to protect our women is when they're under threat by an
alien?
And the only time we remember those who struggle in our own countries is
when our resources are going to those overseas?

We've built cities for rich able-bodied white cis het men and wonder why
nobody else feels at ease in them
(How many cities do you know where a wheelchair user can easily be part of
the public space?)
A rotten system in which those who try to stop the exploitation of our planet
end up in jail
And those destroying the environment, destroying any notion of a future
Take their private jet to their yacht while they drink champagne that costs more
than the monthly wage of their employees
The smallest steps towards a better world pushed back upon
Because if you can't even respect another person's pronouns or who they love,
what kind of society are we living in?

One person's freedom ends where another's begins
Yet some try to inflate their freedom until it squashes and pushes out everyone
else.
This sense of entitlement is suffocating
It's exhausting and pitiful.

We are here and it's a gift
Yet it can feel like empty words echo off the mountain tops.

"With each privilege comes a responsibility"
We are quick to remember when people risk lives on boats headed towards us
in search of a better future
But we don't often stop to think and reflect on the responsibility stemming
from the privileges awarded to us solely by luck and coincidence
and the crimes of our ancestors.

Dismantle, deconstruct, decolonise, degrow.

Marching for the rights of others does not often come naturally
But the world is on fire and so are we
So let us use this fire to power a cause, a change for the better
We must march for those who cannot
And it should be an honour.
Instead of empty words and delusions of grandeur
May compassion and urgency guide us
Let us focus on intersectionality, inclusion, diversity,
Kindness, connection, community, care.

I fear we are too late, sometimes,
But the time for fear has passed.
The only thing there's time for now
Is perseverance and action.

AUTHOR Biographies

Diyya Abdulkader is a passionate 26-year-old Kurdish writer from Iraq who believes in the power of words to inspire change. Drawing from her experience in digital communications and community outreach, Dea uses her writing to give voice to her world and its challenges. Through her work, she highlights important topics such as environmental sustainability, the significance of community engagement, and leadership development. Her writing for the European Forum Alpbach reflects on an embarrassing moment of truth that forced her to confront her struggles and accept—or attempt to change—the harsh reality she faced.

Anna Bauer (b. 2001) lives in Vienna and Burgenland. She studies Education (German Philology, Arts and Crafts) and Digital Humanities at the University of Vienna and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. With a bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature, Anna writes about nature and (non)human life. She works as a librarian at the University of Vienna and as a student assistant at the Austrian Academy of Sciences on the project “Vienna’s Memorable Sites – Deep Mapping Early Modern Travel Guides.” She is a 2024 scholarship holder for the EFA, supported by Club Alpbach Burgenland.

Sam Deddeh is a second-generation Assyrian American currently studying law at the University of Vienna. Before making the transition to law, Sam was an English and history teacher in three different countries. Today she still teaches as a volunteer at a Gymnasium in her district. A Fulbright scholarship brought Sam to Austria and she hopes to stay after completing her degree. In her spare time, Sam enjoys writing, hiking, and doing remote strategy work for her boys volleyball teams back home. Sam is extremely passionate about inclusive education and uplifting the voices of people in Diaspora.

Lucy English is a spoken word poet and novelist. She has two collections published by Burning Eye Books. The most recent, *The Book of Hours*, is the poetry from her online project of the same name which features 48 poetry films made in collaboration with 27 filmmakers. Lucy is Professor of Creative Enterprise at Bath Spa University and editor/contributor of *Spoken Word* in the UK published by Routledge in 2021. She is currently working on an immersive hologram poetry film installation *Cancer Alley* highlighting extreme pollution in Louisiana.

Benjamin Frommann is a 24-year-old student currently completing his Master's Degree at the Vienna School of International Studies (Diplomatic Academy). Before studying at the DA he completed his Bachelors at the Lauder

Business School in Vienna in International Business Administration. Since highschool, he has been engaged in student representation. During his Bachelor he was chairman of the student union at LBS and now holds a mandate for the Austrian Federal Student Union. He is very much interested in strengthening the European Single market and advocating for a strong and capable European Union.

Mag. (FH) Dr. Alexander Gstrein, MSC, is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Austrian Armed Forces and currently serves as the Austrian Ministry of Defence. His research focuses on the organizational culture of armed forces, aiming to foster a better working environment and enhance the Austrian Armed Forces' appeal as an employer. In addition to his military career, he runs a private company specializing in leadership training and consulting, called >>Weichensteller<< (www.weichensteller.at).

Isio Ighofose: "Hi, I'm Isio, I come from a little city called Leicester up in the East Mids of the UK, and while I finish my final year at RADA I live in London. My main pursuits are meeting the world and the alchemy of trying to turn experience into expression; for art's sake and for life in general. Thanks to EFA and Cass for a whole bunch of both :)"

Jure Ivić is an Assistant Professor at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Split, Croatia, with a background in philosophy, metaphysics, and art history. He holds a master's degree from the Faculty of Philosophy in Split and a licentiate in philosophy from Rome. Currently pursuing a doctorate at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Jure blendings academic research with curatorial projects, organizing contemporary art exhibitions and archaeological excavations. Jure's work explores the metaphysical dimensions of philosophy and contributes to educational and cultural initiatives, bridging philosophy, cultural heritage, and education from his base in Split.

Edrinë Krasniqi is a 22 year old student from Kosova, pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Besides her chosen career path, she has profound interest in politics, particularly in the context of her home country, Kosova. She plans to return home, and help on the journey towards her nation's development and EU membership. During school breaks, you can catch her visiting a new place and capturing mesmerizing views from her camera, playing a few of your favorite melodies on her electric guitar, or reading a novel from her favorite author, Ismail Kadare.

Joseph Felix Krautgasser is a 24-year-old law student from Styria, Austria, is completing his degree at the University of Graz while working as a student assistant. His research focuses on the intersections of law and politics,

particularly examining political systems and their evolution. With a strong interest in Austrian and European politics and history within a global context, he actively explores questions surrounding politics and society.

Charley Lane-McElroy is a writer living and working in Bristol, England. He writes poetry and dramatic pieces for stage and screen. He writes folky stuff, old stuff, and gossip - the voices and patter from his community.

Sonia Mogojan is a 21-year-old psychology student from Romania, currently completing her bachelor's degree. With a passion for understanding human behavior, her interests extend into fields like philosophy and non-formal education. Sonia has contributed to writing projects for educational programs aimed at empowering individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. As she works toward becoming a licensed psychologist, Sonia is committed to combining her knowledge of psychology with her enthusiasm for fostering inclusive, supportive environments where people can learn, grow, and thrive.

Cass McLaughlin (b. 1996) is a multidisciplinary artist, project manager, and creative educator based in the mountains of Puerto Rico. Cass completed a B.S. in Entertainment Industry Studies from Belmont University, Nashville in 2018, and is currently pursuing an MA in Nature and Travel Writing at Bath Spa University, England.

Colas van Moorsel is a climate justice activist and professor at IHECS, Belgium's leading communication and journalism school, where he teaches climate education and the power of narrative in driving systemic change. Over the past four years, he has worked with leaders in politics, civil society, and business, refining his understanding of impactful storytelling. His participation in EFA offered new insights on tackling the "imagination crisis" through narrative. Colas also founded the YouTube channel *Autrement* and consults with organizations to create meaningful narratives that make the ecological and social transition accessible and desirable.

Juraj Obrež is an economist and marketer with a strong focus on innovation and economic growth. He has worked across the IT sector, from local startups to a Fast Company-recognized Most Innovative Company and a multi-billion-dollar unicorn. As a leader in a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing financial literacy, he is passionate about fostering economic education. Juraj received a special Dean's Award for his project blueprinting innovation of the Croatian elementary school system at the Faculty of Economics and Business in Zagreb, where he is completing his Master's in Business Economics and Marketing.

Valentina Ostojić is a 26-year-old Montenegrin activist and columnist with

academic experiences in Montenegro, Slovenia, Germany, Sweden, and the U.S. Her work focuses on socio-economic issues, youth, good governance, and European integration, shaped by her involvement with civil society organizations and research institutions. Valentina has published numerous columns and studies, driven by a passion for lifelong learning and a commitment to promoting positive social change and continuous development.

Emina Pašanović is a project manager from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with expertise in renewable energy and sustainable innovation. She has promoted green technology and EU integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, earning recognition as a Max Thabiso Edkins Climate Ambassador for the Global Youth Climate Network. Emina is also a trainee in Oxford University's Global Youth Climate Training Programme. Her debut chapter for the European Forum Alpbach explores the cultural significance of Bosnian coffee, using it as a metaphor for community, resilience, and cross-border connection. Her writing reflects her passion for bridging cultures and promoting dialogue.

Renata Penchova is a Macedonian language lecturer at Beijing Foreign Studies University and an author of four books of poetry. She participated in Macedonia's School for Political Education, led by President Stevo Pendarovski, and the School of Young Leaders, founded by former President Gjorge Ivanov. Based in Beijing, she contributes to the Shaanxi Association and ATA Association, focusing on youth, advocacy, and entrepreneurship.

Susanne Roberts is a Master's student specializing in Forest Products Technology and Timber Construction, with a focus on wood chemistry. She aims to pursue a PhD to advance green solutions through wood chemistry innovations. Her studies have included research collaborations with Poznań University of Life Science and BOKU in Vienna, as well as semesters abroad in South Korea and Poland. In her free time, Susanne enjoys painting, drawing, crochet, and embroidery, and has been a dedicated choir member since childhood.

Tobias Sauer studies International Affairs in a Franco-German dual degree at Sciences Po and Freie Universität Berlin. His main interests lay in Franco-German relations, conflict studies and the political organisation of violence at the intersection between security and development cooperation - especially regarding the Arab World(s) and its various relations with Europe.

Jeldrik Schottke (b. 1998) grew up in Liechtenstein and began his career in finance with an apprenticeship in 2017. He pursued a BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Salzburg and Sciences Po Lyon, graduating in 2022. Following this, he worked as a student assistant at the Liechtenstein

Institute, supporting Dr. Christian Frommelt's research, and later as a trainee at the Liechtenstein Embassy Vienna. In 2024, Jeldrik began an MA in Global History at the University of Vienna, focusing on the history of trade and labour in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Lucía Z. Serrano Rocabado is a Bolivian human rights lawyer with an LLB from the Universidad Católica Boliviana, a Diploma in Sustainable Development and Global Justice from the University of Antwerp, and an MA in Governance and Human Rights from the Autonomous University of Madrid. She currently works at the UNHCR's Global Citizenship Education Department in Madrid. Lucía previously provided legal and academic support to the Andean Parliament and taught Human Rights at the Universidad Católica Boliviana. She has also volunteered extensively with indigenous youth leaders, environmental human rights defenders, and victims of sexual violence. Her work with civil society reflects her commitment to advocacy and social transformation.

Lisa Settari teaches German as a foreign language and courses in Austrian culture and society at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Romania. Born in South Tyrol, Italy, she has embraced the freedom of movement as an EU citizen, living in England, Scotland, France, Belgium, and Austria. Writing primarily in German and English, with occasional pieces in French and Italian, her work explores themes of politics and the complexities of human relationships. Lisa's poetry has been featured in South Tyrol's first queer art anthology, and she has performed her work at events like the "Road to Pride" in Bolzano. She also shared her writing at a literary lunch in Kastelruth.

Patrick Silvan Scheiwiller is a Swiss national particularly interested and experienced in economic, security, and foreign policy. He holds a bachelor's degree in international affairs (political science, economics, law, and business administration) from the University of St. Gallen (HSG) and currently studies at master's level at the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID). Besides, he worked for the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Thurgau and the Swiss Embassy in Germany. After receiving a scholarship for this year's European Forum Alpbach, he joined the board of Club Alpbach Switzerland.

Christina Steinhart is a 23-year-old student, currently pursuing her Master's in International Development, project coordinator and story-teller at heart who seeks to inspire action through words. She aspires to bring together her nature-centric upbringing in rural Austria with her experience with grassroots initiatives and international organizations to unite diverse voices, and foster a global dialogue through creative means. Driven by a curiosity for cultural connection and new ideas, her writing reflects on overcoming internal struggles to

effectuate change and empower oneself and those in one's surroundings, shattering glass ceilings.

Marina Vanni is an Argentine-Spanish writer, editor, and communications specialist. Her written and audiovisual work has been featured in international platforms including CNN, Latin Counsel, and WifOR Institute. Besides attending the European Forum Alpbach as scholarship holder, speaker, and moderator, she joined the Forum Alpbach Network Committee (FANC 2024) and organized events such as the art exhibition "Road to Alpbach". Currently based in Berlin, she grew up in suburban Buenos Aires, where her creative side and love for languages was born. You will rarely find her without a camera, a notebook, and a guitar.

Andrea Veselá (she/her) is an intersectional feminist and environmentalist, who spends most of her professional and free time on topics related to climate and social justice. The time that remains she likes to divide between her wonderful partner, friends, family, communities and dog, as well as mushroom foraging, running and most activities that your average ultra-capitalist would classify as "lazy."

Milica Vujačić is an energy policy officer at Austria's Federal Ministry for Climate Action, specializing in renewable energy. She holds degrees in industrial engineering, environmental technology, and international affairs from the Technical Universities of Berlin and Vienna and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. Formerly a coordinator for the World Energy Council's Young Energy Professionals Programme, Milica remains engaged as a senior advisor. Her dedication and expertise have earned her a spot on the Technical University of Vienna's 2023 "30 Under 30" list of talents.

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