

**IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE 2023:  
SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN SERVICE OF SECURITY AND DIGNITY**

*The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Europe's  
Sciences and Arts Leaders and Scholars*

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**ALMA MATER  
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**Welcome address by the president of the Republic of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar**

Your Excellency Minister Higher education, Science and Innovation, esteemed President of Alma Mater Europaea, esteemed Honorary President of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, dear President of the Organizing Committee, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to welcome you as an honorary patron of this international scientific conference, where discussions in the next few days will revolve around topics and contents that present many challenges for all of us today. These are the growing needs for technological development in relation to safety and human dignity. Security is one of the fundamental human rights. I have in mind not only national or state security, but also a person's personal security, his protection against the violation of human rights, diseases, natural disasters, poverty. It is therefore about the need to ensure the well-being of both, the individual and the community in all segments of our lives. This requires the exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as a joint action of all of us, not only the competent state bodies and institutions, but also non-governmental organizations, civil society, and every individual. Only in this way can we ensure the widest possible security for everyone, and with it the prosperity and development of the community. The solutions that lead us to this must be unwaveringly committed to respecting the rule of law, i.e., its three constitutive elements: legality, democracy and human rights and fundamental freedoms.



*Nataša Pirc Musar, President of the Republic of Slovenia, Honorary Patron of the It's About People Conference*

*Foto: Marko Pigac*

Dignity is also a human right. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, the first article states the fundamental idea: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Dignity and human rights belong to us as human beings and are not conditioned by gender, skin colour, religion or ethnicity, age, education, social position and power, wealth, merits and achievements or any other personal circumstance. The only condition for them is belonging to a common lineage. Our future rests on two large and connected foundations: knowledge and related technological development, without which we cannot face challenges such as sustainable development and the green transition, adaptation to climate change and the decline of biodiversity, and food security.

Slovenia was among the initiators of the new human right to a clean and healthy living environment, which was announced by the United Nations General Assembly last year. In addition to this right, we also wrote the right to clean drinking water into our constitution. Now the key question is how to ensure the aforementioned right. We also talked about this at the conference for the less developed countries this week in Doha, where I specifically highlighted the need to encourage local innovation, research, and development in the less developed countries, and I emphasized that for sustainable economic growth it is necessary to promote equality and, of course, the empowerment of women. In Doha, I came to the realization, which I may have been subconsciously aware of, that the world is unfair, that wealth is very unevenly distributed in this world. When you talk to the president of Malawi, who tells you that an individual there has to survive on €1.20 a day, while watching from the side-lines the European Union, which causes a lot of emissions and releases harmful effects into the environment (of course, Europe is not the only one, also China and the United States America), and when these underdeveloped countries talk about the catastrophic consequences they have as a result of climate change, while they themselves contribute only 4 percent to it but represent a quarter of the entire world population, then I don't know if the developed world is doing enough to make us all happy on this planet. Sometimes I lose a little faith in hope. But you know, as long as we in Europe and other parts of the world, where we have more resources at our disposal to live well, realize how very important the green breakthrough is, how very important it is that we all do something together to ensure that our planet survives, then there is light at the end of the tunnel. And I believe that at your faculty - and that you will probably also talk a lot about this at this conference, that this awareness will be transferred to the young people, some of whom are sitting here in the hall today. Then, even as president, I will look with happier eyes at this future of ours.

The European Union contributes, as Team Europe, as we like to say, 71 billion dollars annually for less developed countries within the framework of the United Nations. It's a big resource, but you know, giving money just isn't enough. Sometimes it's the little things that are needed. For example, the president of Seychelles and I talked about whether we could arrange for one student to come and study in Slovenia. And now I'm working on it. One student. Slovenia is certainly such a rich country that it will be able to afford and help one student from the Seychelles, maybe one from Malawi, Mozambique... I hope that even such a small project will be successful.

Dear participants, an even more important foundation of our perspective and development are values as life guides and the ethics based on them. Especially bioethics and morality. Talking about values and ethics, even in connection with scientific and technological progress, is also not enough. It is necessary to implement them in the life of the individual and the community. High ethical principles and values have ensured that knowledge will be used for the benefit of humanity. The essential mechanisms here

are the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, values, and ethics, including the greater role of education.

How does this work in practice? What challenges await us in this area of our lives and coexistence? People over the age of 65 already represent more than a fifth of all Slovenian residents. Projections predict that in 2050 there will already be 48% of 65+ years old. According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization, the elderly belong to the group of vulnerable both in the field of health maintenance, appropriate treatment at home, as well as in the community and social care institutions. The high risk of ageism and violence against the elderly is also recognised, which was also pointed out by the latest epidemic.

Simone de Beauvoir already wrote about the silence of old age more than 50 years ago, and her theses are still relevant today. We must stop the growth of stereotyping, hating the elderly, paternalism and even discrimination against the elderly, fed by the mantra of neoliberalism. It is believed that when you are older, you are not useful, and you are not worth anything. It is unacceptable that as many as 60,000 pensioners, single elderly women in Slovenia, live in poverty. Respect for the dignity and fundamental human rights of the elderly must be the main guide in finding solutions for the care of the elderly. The condition for all this is intergenerational solidarity, cooperation and, above all, a strong welfare state with public healthcare, education, and social services, as well as a good pension policy that will eliminate long-term poverty among the elderly. Along with personal freedom, safety and dignity, health is the most important value for young and old alike. My goal is therefore clear: no one should be left without health services when they need them. As president, I will work hard for this goal and contribute to its fulfilment to the best of my ability.



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Autism, for example, which will be one of the topics at this conference, is just one of the areas that are important to both children and the elderly. It is important that doctors and the entire team of health workers diagnose autism as soon as possible, and subsequently, people with autism need a lot of support and help from various experts so that they can live integrated into society like everyone else.

Unfortunately, even in the field of paediatrics and child psychiatry, despite extraordinary efforts at all different levels, there are unwanted waiting times and also problems when, after a diagnosis has been made, further help is needed at the primary or secondary level of medical activity. At the transition to adulthood, however, this help is completely unsystematized and left to private initiative. The public health system thus still faces many challenges in this area.

I would like to talk about another very important topic. About behaviour that represents a serious violation of human rights, including the right to life, safety and dignity. Behaviour that is a serious social problem even in our country, even though we live in a society in which we are all equal according to the law, yet our everyday life is still strongly permeated with inequality. I am talking about violence against women, not only because I am a woman and not only because I am the president of the republic, but because it is necessary to talk about it out loud. It is about domestic violence and femicide, which I don't know if you are aware of, is the most common cause of death for women in the world. It is most characterized by prior intimate partner violence in the form of prior threats, stalking, manipulation, crossing acceptable boundaries, subjugation, and intimidation. Increased social, political and media pressure is needed to strengthen efforts to respond appropriately to domestic violence. My thanks and my support go to the non-governmental organizations for their work in this area. Courage and solidarity are essential in a global society that still discriminates against women. Without brave women, feminists, we would not have the rights we have today. Bell Hooks, or Gloria Jean Watkins, in her book *Feminism for everyone* emphasized that we must courageously learn from the past and work for a future in which feminist principles will underpin every aspect of our public and private lives. To be clear, feminism supports the equality of men and women. Us women are not in the world in order for men to have less rights, but to have equal rights. And to not take advantage of the potential of this planet, which in our country represents half of the population (even in Slovenia, there are 51.1% women), would be extremely unwise and harmful to the society. We need a clear message to everyone, especially the youngest, that we will live better as a society if we strengthen and live solidarity and are tolerant and respectful towards each other. Or, as Marcus Aurelius wrote: "Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one."

Learning and empowerment with knowledge is an investment in society that builds bridges between us. In conclusion, I would like to wish you a constructive discussion and exchange of knowledge, experience and also wisdom, which is enormous in this hall. If I use Hegel's multi-meaning phrase, this kind of discussion can be a condition that Minerva's owl does not arrive too late.

Thank you very much and I wish you a good work.