GIS 2026

HOSTED BY

GFCC GLOBAL FEDERATION OF COMPETITIVENESS COUNCILS

GBS

EVENT BOOK

# GFCC ANNUAL MEETING AND GLOBAL INNOVATION SUMMIT

## Powering Competitiveness: Energy, Infrastructure, & Digital Innovation For Economic Transformation

SOFIA AND PLOVDIV, BULGARIA | OCT. 19 - 22

**PARTNERS**

DELPHI ECONOMIC FORUM

Advisory Council On Competitiveness Of Bulgaria

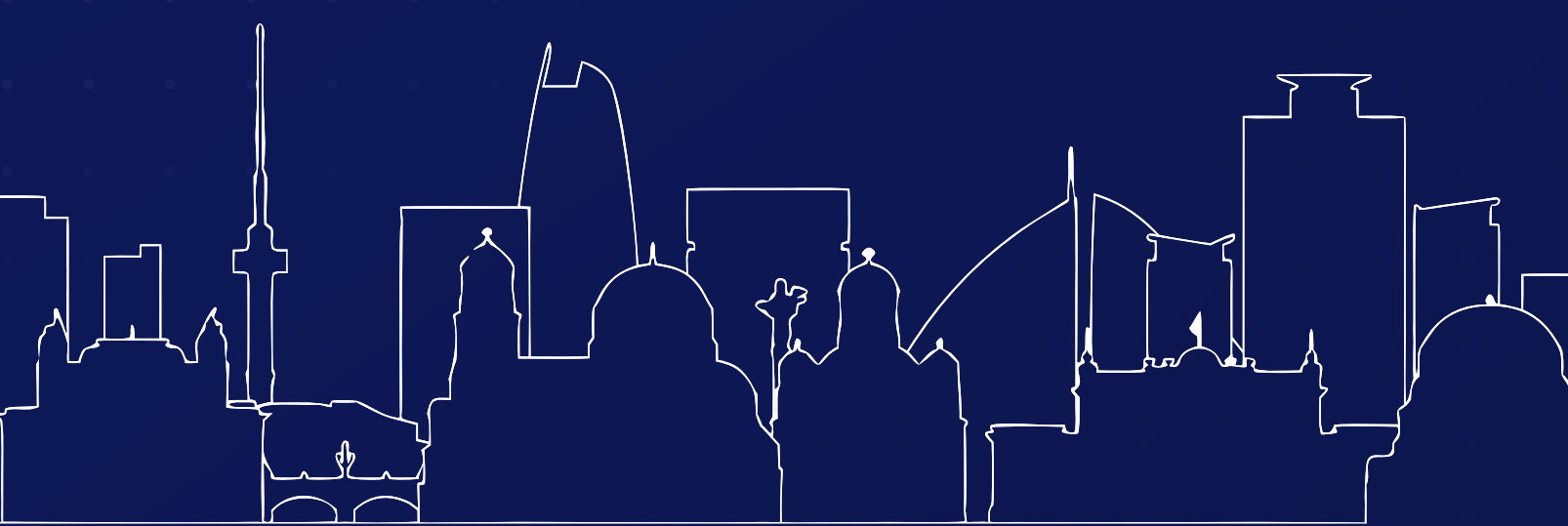
AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN BULGARIA

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To learn more about the GFCC visit our home page at thegfcc.org



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# Welcome to the 2026 Global Innovation Summit

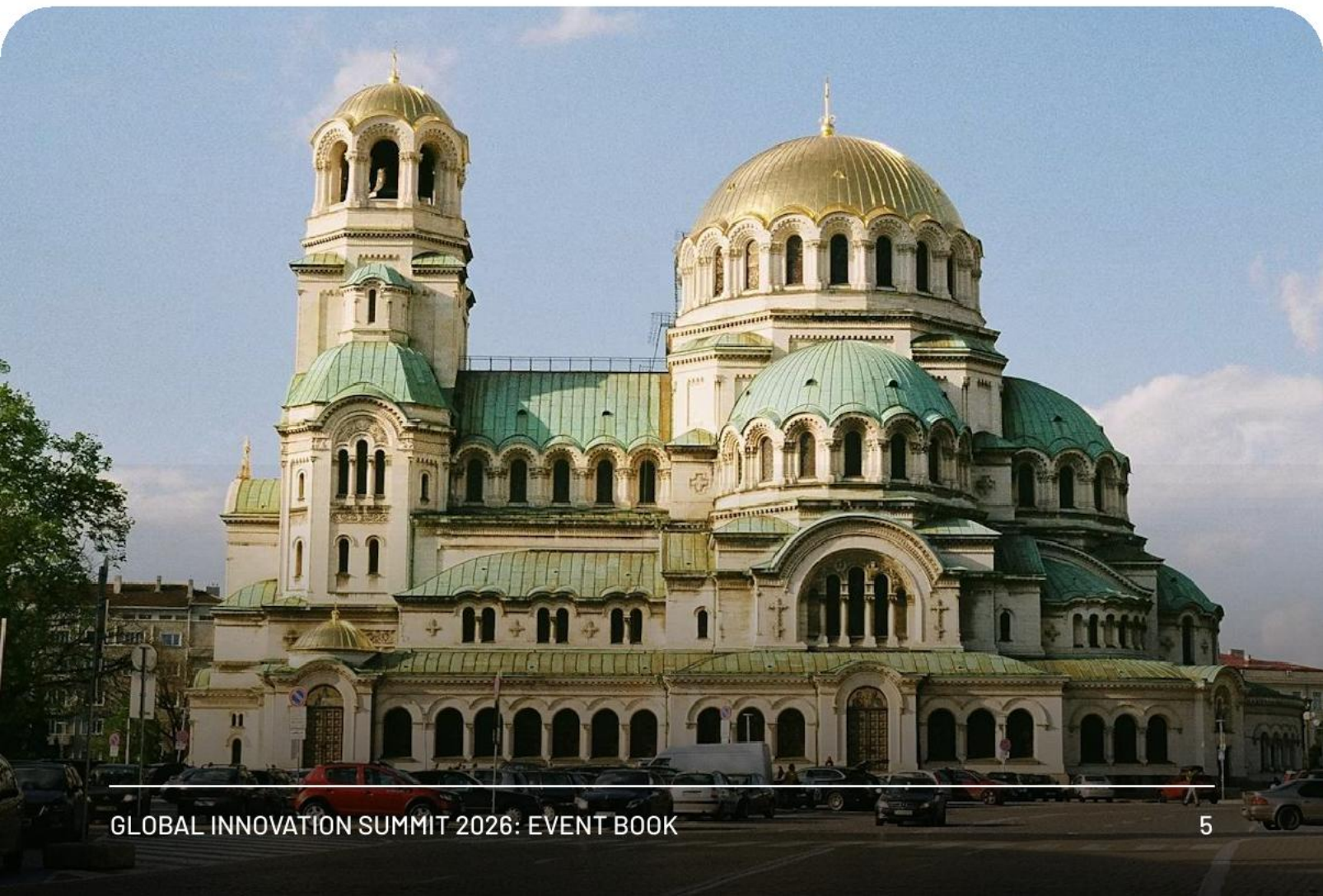
We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2026 Global Innovation Summit under the theme "Powering Competitiveness: Energy, Infrastructure, and Digital Innovation for Economic Transformation," taking place **October 19–22 in Sofia and Plovdiv, Bulgaria.**

The 2026 Global Innovation Summit is hosted by the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) together with its member Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), in partnership with the Advisory Council on Competitiveness (ACC) of Bulgaria and Delphi Economic Forum (DEF). GBS is one of the largest construction groups in Southeastern Europe, and its role as host reflects a shared commitment with the GFCC to convening the leaders who shape the industries at the heart of this year's conversation.

This edition of the Summit brings together heads of state, business executives, innovators, and policymakers from across sectors and continents, alongside Bulgarian leaders and institutions, for direct dialogue on the challenges and opportunities shaping global competitiveness today.

Our host cities were chosen not by chance, but for what they represent. Sofia, Bulgaria's capital and largest economic center, anchors the country's growing technology, finance, and innovation sectors, and serves as a natural meeting point between Europe and the wider region. Plovdiv, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Europe, offers a living testament to millennia of cultural exchange and resilience, while also standing as an industrial hub where GBS maintains an active presence, including in energy projects. These qualities mirror the Summit's own mission of connecting diverse perspectives to build lasting economic progress. Together, these two cities embody Bulgaria's unique position as a bridge between historical depth and forward-looking ambition, providing a fitting backdrop for conversations about competitiveness and transformation.

> This guide is designed to share the event's detailed agenda, explain the general event flow, provide a list of speakers and their bios, and offer key logistical information. We look forward to the ideas and connections that will emerge from our time in this city, and we wish you a productive and engaging event.



# Agenda Overview

| | DAY | EVENING |
|---|---|---|
| **MONDAY** OCT 19 | GFCC Annual Meeting * Serdika Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel | Welcome Reception ** National Archaeological Museum |
| **TUESDAY** OCT 20 | Global Innovation Summit: Powering Competitiveness Royal Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel | Networking Cocktail and Gala Dinner ** Royal Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel |
| **WEDNESDAY** OCT 21 | Site Visits Sofia Tech Park and Industrial Sites (Departing from Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel) | Open Time |
| **THURSDAY** OCT 22 | Site Visits *** GBS Prefab Plant and Trakia Economic Zone, Plovdiv (Departing from Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel) | Open Time |
| **FRIDAY** OCT 23 | Return to Sofia *** (Departing from DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center) | Open Time |

**LEGEND** ☐ GFCC Members and Fellows only ☐ Open to all attendees

## Please Note:

* The Annual Meeting and site visits are exclusively for GFCC members and fellows.
** The welcome reception and gala dinner are reserved for **pre-registered attendees only.** Unfortunately, we are unable to accommodate individuals who are not on the confirmed guest list.
*** Plovdiv site visit participants will have the option to return to Sofia in the evening of October 22 or the morning of October 23.

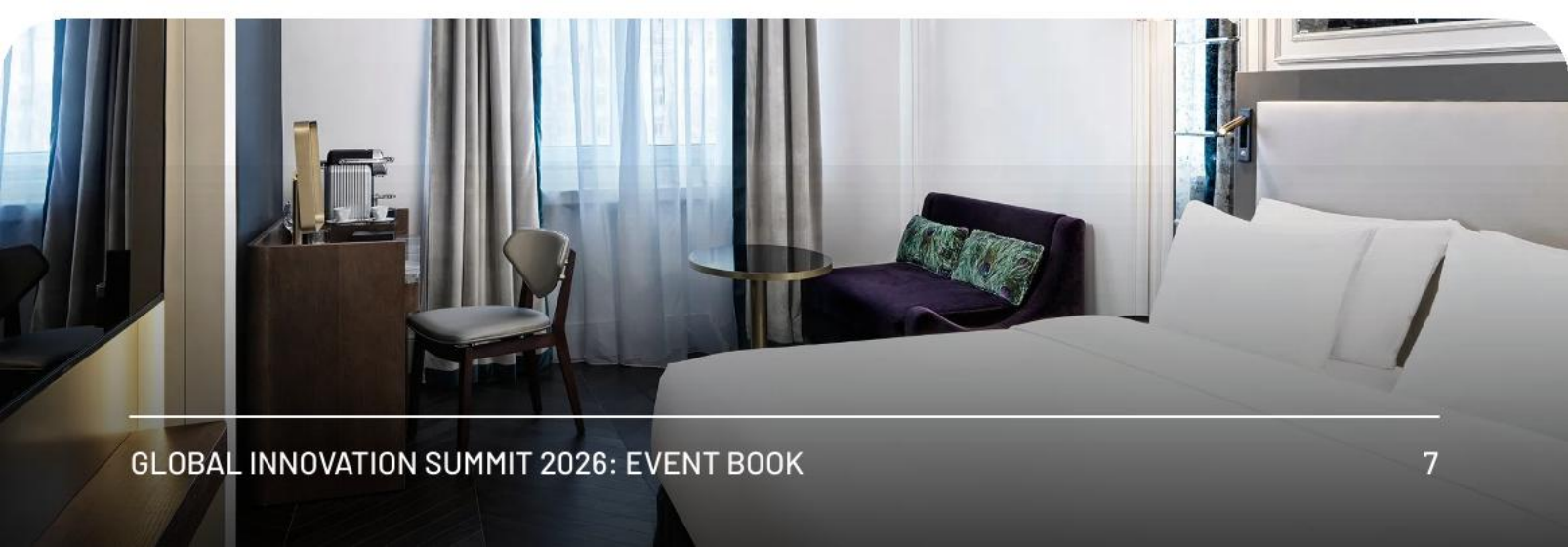
# Addresses

| NAME | ADDRESS |
| --- | --- |
| Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel | 5, pl. "Sveta Nedelya", 1000 Sofia Center, Sofia, Bulgaria |
| National Archeological Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences | 1, pl. "Atanas Burov", 1000 Sofia Center, Sofia, Bulgaria |
| DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center | 1, pl. "Sveta Petka", 4000 Plovdiv Center, Plovdiv, Bulgaria |

# Lodging

The Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel is the main event venue and most convenient option. You can book your stay using the event link: **Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel, Sofia, Bulgaria | Book Online.**

If you plan to stay in Plovdiv on the night of October 22, we recommend the DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center — it's within walking distance of the suggested sightseeing and cultural activities in the city. Book your stay via the hotel's official website: **Available Rooms - DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center.**





# Transportation

Attendees are responsible for arranging their own transportation to and from the airport. Two safe and convenient options are recommended:

## BY METRO

The Sofia Metro (Line 4) runs directly from the airport to the city center with no need to change trains. Get off at the Serdika stop, a short walk from the Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel. The trip takes approximately 30 minutes, and trains run from 5:30 AM to midnight on weekdays and holidays. A one-way ticket costs approximately €1.60.

## BY TAXI

Rideshare apps such as Uber are not available in Bulgaria, so taxis are the recommended option. For your comfort and safety, we recommend the licensed taxi operator Yellow!, the contractual partner of SOF Connect, the concessioner of Sofia Airport. Yellow! also offers a mobile app (available on the App Store and Google Play) for easy booking, real-time tracking, and card payment.

Look for Yellow! cars at the main taxi ranks, or request the service at the Yellow! offices in the Arrivals halls of Terminal 1 and Terminal 2.

**Phone:** +359 2 9 11 19
**Website:** www.yellow333.com

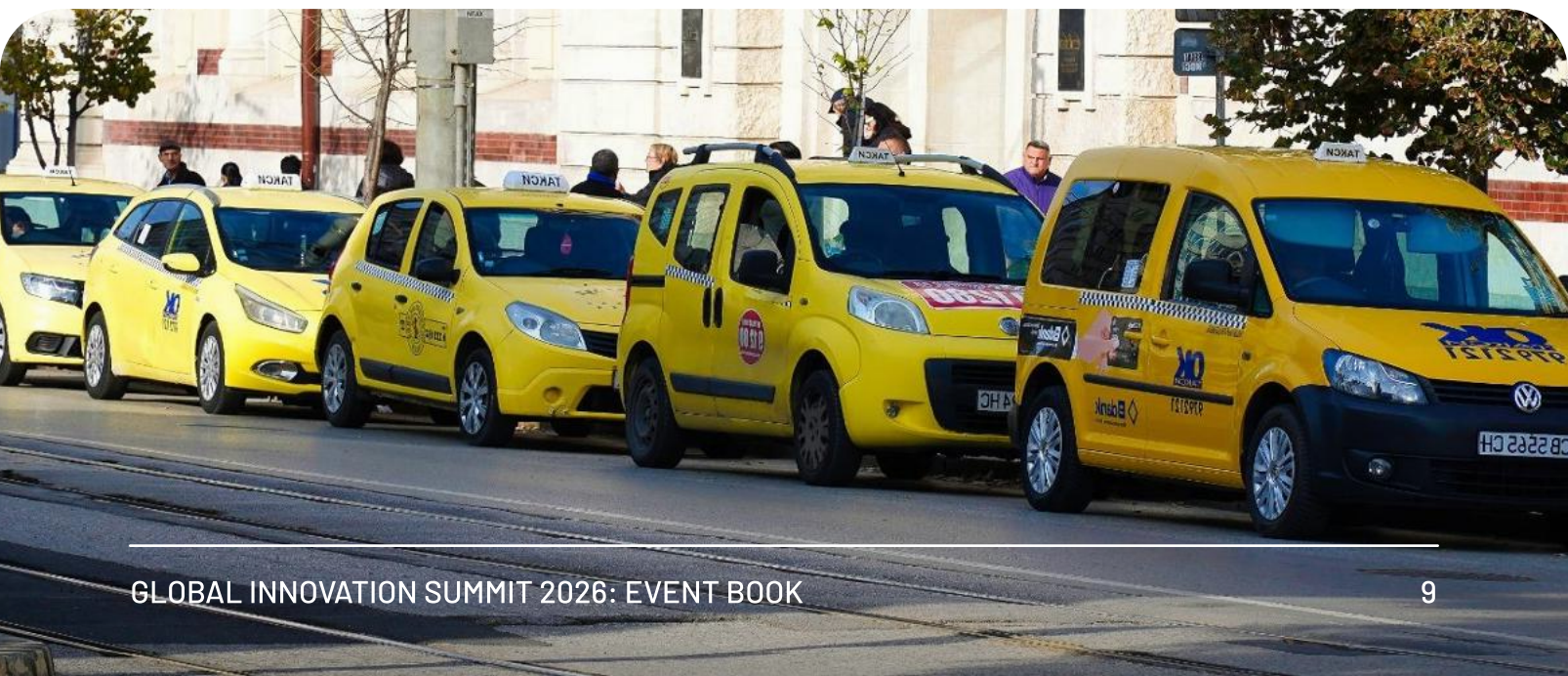
> **IMPORTANT:**
> To avoid the risk of overcharging or unsafe service, we recommend against using taxi services offered outside the Yellow! office or in front of the terminal.

The GFCC Annual Meeting (Oct. 19) and the Global Innovation Summit and Gala Dinner (Oct. 20) will take place at the Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel. The Welcome Reception on Oct. 19 at the National Archaeological Museum is just a 4-minute walk from the hotel, so no transportation is needed. If you are staying at a different location, you are responsible for arranging your own transportation to these events.

**Transportation will be provided for all site visits. Shuttles will depart from and return to the Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel.**

On the last day of the event (Oct. 23), the return shuttle to Sofia will depart from the DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center.

> **NOTE:**
> If you miss the provided transportation, please plan to arrange your own transport to these locations.



# Registration

Everyone must register individually for the event using the appropriate link below:

- **GFCC Members and Fellows:** 2026 GFCC Annual Meeting and Global Innovation Summit registration
- **Other guests:** 2026 Global Innovation Summit registration

**This is an invitation-only event.**

Upon successful registration, you will receive a confirmation email. Please check your spam folder if you don't see it. For any questions regarding your registration status, please contact Elaine Rodriguez at **erodriguez@thegfcc.org**.

# On-Site Check-In

| EVENT | DATE | CHECK-IN BEGINS AT |
|---|---|---|
| GFCC Annual Meeting | October 19 | 8:30 AM |
| Global Innovation Summit | October 20 | 7:45 AM |

> **NOTE:**
> Upon check-in, you will receive your name badge and lanyard. We kindly ask that you wear it at all times during the conference for security and networking purposes.

# Media and Dress Code

**Media Notice:**
This event will be professionally recorded and photographed. Images and audio may be used in post-summit materials and promotional content.

Event recordings will be made available on the GFCC YouTube channel after the event.

**Press Attendance:**
Members of the press will be in attendance during the Global Innovation Summit.

**GFCC Annual Meeting:**
The GFCC Annual Meeting is a private, closed-door event and will not be open to the press.

**Dress Code:**
Sessions, reception, and dinner (GFCC Annual Meeting and Global Innovation Summit): Business attire or corresponding national dress.

**Site visits:**
Business casual/industrial. Please wear flat, closed-toe, comfortable shoes, and clothing appropriate for outdoor and industrial settings (e.g., avoid open-toe shoes and heels, as some sites may require safety precautions).

# Need Help?




**Viktoria Stoyanova**
Chief Communications Officer, GBS
**vstoyanova@gbs-bg.com**





**Roberto Alvarez**
Executive Director, GFCC
**ralvarez@thegfcc.org**





**Elaine Rodriguez**
Director of Operations, GFCC
**erodriguez@thegfcc.org**

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Will transportation be provided from the airport to the Sofia Balkan Palace?**

No. Participants are responsible for arranging their own transportation between the airport and the hotel.

**I arrived at the event. Where do I check in?**

Check-in desks are located near the event room. Staff members will be available at the entrances to assist you

**If I am attending the Annual Meeting and have already checked in on Monday, do I need to check in again for the Global Innovation Summit?**

No. You only need to register and pick up your badge on your first day. Please keep your badge with you throughout the event.

**I am a Summit (October 20) speaker (moderator, panelist, or keynote). Where should I go before my session starts?**

Please head to the Rila Conference Room at least 20 minutes before your session, where you'll meet your fellow speakers. Follow the signs or ask any event staff member for directions.

**How can I let the organizers know about my dietary restrictions?**

Meat and vegetarian options will be available at all meals. Catering staff will be on hand at each meal to assist with any questions or specific dietary needs.

**Once my session is over, where do I go?**

Simply return to the Rila Conference Room to collect your belongings.

**Will transportation be provided for the reception and dinner?**

No transportation will be provided for the reception on October 19 or the dinner on October 20. The reception is a 3 to 4-minute walk from the conference hotel, and the gala dinner takes place at the conference hotel itself. Please check the event agenda section of this book for specific timing.

**Will transportation be provided for the site visits?**

Yes. Please check the event agenda section of this book for specific pickup times and locations.

**I am a panelist in one of the Panel Conversations. Is there anything I should know?**

Yes! Our events team should have sent you an email with session details and contact information for your fellow panelists. If you haven't received it, please contact Elaine Rodriguez (erodriguez@thegfcc.org) or Roberto Alvarez (ralvarez@thegfcc.org). The "Agenda" section also lists your fellow panelists, and the "Session Dynamics and Roles" section provides more detail on the session format — including confirming that Panel Conversations are designed to be informal and conversational, so no slides or presentations are needed.

# Session Dynamics

## PANEL CONVERSATION

Each "Panel" will last 45 minutes, including time for transitions.

Do not plan to use slides. Panels will be moderated and conversational.

The moderator will open the panel discussion with a brief overview (3-4 minutes) and jumpstart the conversation, including directing a set of suggested questions to the panelists. The moderator may ask broad questions to the group or direct questions to specific panelists. Panelists should also feel free to raise, in the context of the conversation, a relevant topic the suggested questions may not address.

In the initial round, panelists will have 2-3 minutes for their remarks. Panelists should first endeavor to reflect on the moderator's proposed question. The moderator will guide more of a free-flow conversation after the initial round.

The moderator will conclude the panel at the appointed time by summarizing the conversation (2-3 minutes). Timing for the event is tight. Moderators and panelists will need to be conscious of the length of their remarks.

There will be a countdown clock during the session to support time management.

## KEYNOTES

Keynote sessions are individual presentations where a single speaker shares insights, ideas, or a vision on a topic central to the Summit's theme. Unlike Panel Conversations, keynotes may include slides and are typically more structured, giving the speaker the floor to develop a focused narrative for the audience.

There will be a countdown clock during the session to support time management.

## SPOTLIGHTS

Innovation Spotlights are short, high-energy presentations in a TED-talk style, where a single speaker shares a bold idea, project, or innovation in a compact format. Like Keynotes, speakers may use slides to support their presentation, but the format favors a tighter, more dynamic delivery.

There will be a countdown clock during the session to support time management.

## FIRESIDE CHAT

A Fireside Chat is a conversation between a moderator (or interviewer) and their guest(s), exploring their perspective, experience, or story in a more dialogue-driven format than a panel. Unlike Panels, it centers on specific voices guided by the interviewer's questions, allowing for a deeper, more personal exchange. Slides are not typically used.

There will be a countdown clock during the session to support time management.

## MODERATED DISCUSSIONS

These sessions are interactive, dynamic, and progressive discussions involving all participants. The purpose is for the moderator — and in some cases a presenter — to set the stage, after which discussants add their own experience to catalyze a conversation that highlights key insights, observations, conclusions, and opportunities drawn from their and others 'experiences.

The sessions are essentially conversational. Discussants should refrain from using slide decks. All participants are seated in a "U-shaped" layout and are invited to join the conversation and actively participate throughout the session.

# Session Roles

## Panel Roles Overview

## Before the Panel (for the summit on Oct 20 ONLY)

- **Arrive early:** Please arrive at the speaker lounge (Rila Conference Room) at least 20 minutes before your session to connect with fellow panelists, preview the conversation to come, and resolve questions.
- **Stage management:** A stage manager will escort you to the stage and cue you when it's time to enter. An announcer will introduce panelists in alphabetical order by last name, followed by the moderator.
- **Moderator's role:**
  - Start the discussion with a brief overview (2-3 minutes).
  - Guide the conversation by asking questions to the panelists.
  - Ensure a balanced discussion and keep the session flowing smoothly.
- **Panelists' role:**
  - Provide concise responses to questions to allow for ample discussion.
  - Engage actively in the conversation and share your insights.

## After the Panel (for the summit on Oct 20 ONLY)

- **Closing:** The moderator will summarize key takeaways (2-3 minutes) and conclude.
- **Exiting the stage:** An announcer will thank the panel, and participants will exit the stage as directed by the stage manager.

## Deeper Dive on the Role of Moderators (Panel Conversations)

- In commencing the panel/spotlight, the moderator should not provide descriptive biographies for each panelist. Panelist/Spotlight Presenters/Moderator biographies will be on our event website and in this event book.
- The moderator will introduce the session and frame the discussion (2-3 min.), guided by the framework and the discussion questions suggested in this event book.
- The moderator will guide the conversation allowing time for response and commentary from other panelists.
- The moderator will close with remarks (2-3 min.) to summarize overall themes and/or provide relevant insights.
- There will be a countdown clock to help manage timing.

## Deeper Dive on the Role of Panelists

- Panelists are requested to provide conversation-catalyzing, thought-provoking, personal responses to the questions posed by the moderator.
- No PowerPoint slides or other graphics will be used during the panels.
- Each Panelist is asked to provide short responses to the questions in order to allow for plenty of conversation.
- If time allows for questions from the audience, panelists should also be prepared to answer questions posed by participants and curated by the moderator.
- Panelists should not provide descriptive self-introductions, as biographies will be on the event website and in this event book.
- Panelists should feel free to mention ongoing projects at their organization relevant to the conversation.
- Panelists should also feel free to raise, in the context of the conversation, a relevant topic that the suggested tee-up questions may not address.

## Deeper Dive on the Role of Discussants

- Discussants are the conversation catalysts. Their role is to spark a rich, open dialogue by sharing an experience-based perspective on the session's themes.
- Prepare approximately 2 minutes of opening remarks. We suggest focusing your initial contribution on a single topic, question, or insight rather than trying to cover everything.
- Draw on your own direct experiences and on-the-ground knowledge — that is what makes discussants' contributions most valuable.
- Do not use slides. The goal is to generate conversation, not deliver a presentation.
- After your opening remarks, engage fully in the open discussion. Feel free to respond to others, build on what has been said, and introduce relevant topics that the suggested questions may not have addressed.

> **NOTE:**
> Timing for the event is tight. Moderators, panelists, and speakers will need to be conscious of the length of their remarks. There will be a countdown clock during the session to support time management.

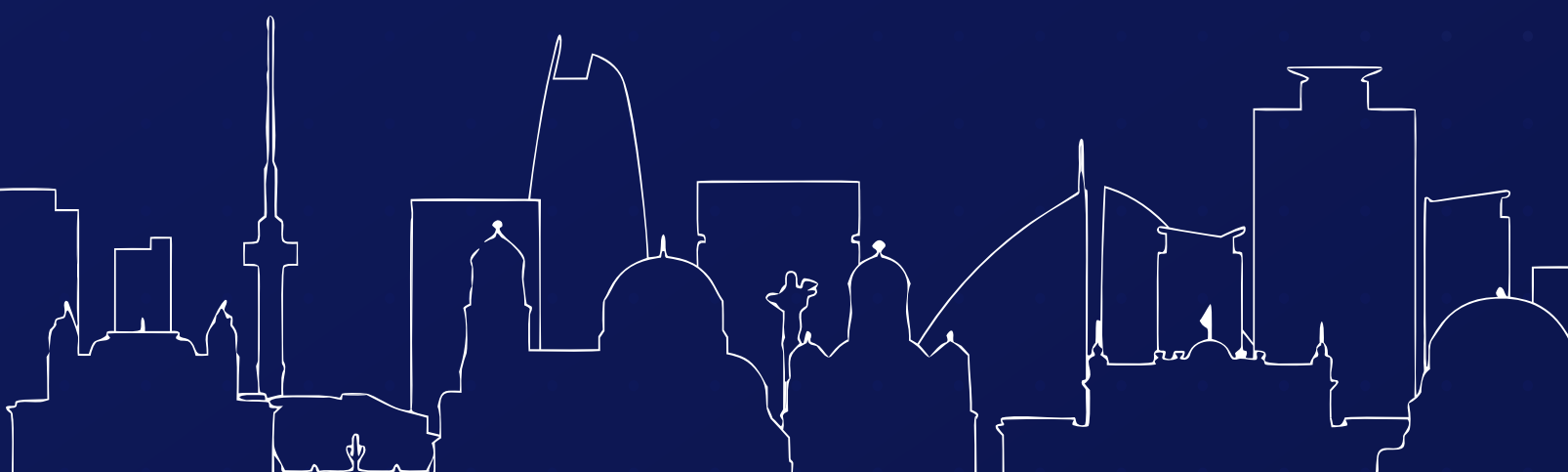
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# AGENDA



# GFCC Annual Meeting

Serdika Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel

19 Oct, 2026

## 9:00 AM Welcome Remarks

15 min

SPEAKERS

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Mr. Kalin Peshov**

Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

## 9:15 AM Participants Individual Introductions – Round Robin Introductions

20 min

## 9:35 AM The State of the GFCC

20 min

Over the past year, the GFCC has continued to expand its global footprint, launch new initiatives and deepen collaboration among members and fellows. This session will provide an update on membership growth, events, task forces, publications, partnerships and strategic priorities.

SPEAKERS

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

## 9:55 AM New Members Spotlight

20 min

Leaders from each new GFCC member taking part in the Annual Meeting will be invited to give 3-minute remarks, introduce their organizations and agendas.

**Dr. Christopher Allen**

Former Resident Economic Advisor to the European Commission in Athens (2015-2024), Greece

**Mr. Erion Isufi**

CEO & Founder, Landmark Communications, Albania

**Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe**

Deputy Director-General for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships, Department of Science, Technology & Innovation - South Africa, South Africa

**Dr. Bernadett Petri**

Managing Director, Hungarian Development Promotion Office, Hungary

**Ms. Jennifer Steel**

Associate Vice President for Government Affairs, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

**Mr. Preslav Tonkov**

Senior Advisor, Global Analytics, Gallup, UK

**Prof. Edward C. Wingenbach**

President, The American College of Greece, Greece

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**10:15 AM** PRESENTATION + ROUNDTABLE 75 min

## The State of the World: Competitiveness in an Era of Disruption

The global economy is experiencing profound transformations driven by geopolitical competition, technological disruption, demographic change, climate change, energy security concerns, transforming global value chains and deep shifts in public sentiment towards government and institutions. Gallup's Preslav Tonkov will open with a 15-minute presentation of global data and insights on prosperity, economic dynamism and institutions. The session will continue with a 60-minute moderated discussion.

MODERATOR

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

PRESENTER

**Mr. Preslav Tonkov**

Senior Advisor, Global Analytics, Gallup, UK

KICK-OFF DISCUSSANTS

**Dr. Fahad R. S. Al Jahwari**

Director, National Competitiveness Office, Oman

**Mr. Eldar Abdrazakov**

Founder, Kazakhstan Growth Forum, Kazakhstan

**Prof. Sir Ian Greer**

President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland

**Dr. Michinari Hamaguchi**

Counselor to the President, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), Japan

**Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe**

Deputy Director-General for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships, Department of Science, Technology & Innovation - South Africa, South Africa

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What should nations prioritize to drive growth and prosperity?
- What opportunities are emerging amid uncertainty and disruption?
- What is the path to adjust institutions to today's fast-evolving reality?
- What all of that has to say to competitiveness and growth strategies?

**11:30 AM** WORKSHOP 75 min

## Human Factors and AI: From Adoption to Impact

A workshop powered by Gallup

Organizations and nations alike are investing heavily in AI, yet adoption rates and realized value often lag behind expectations. This session explores what drives — and constrains — successful AI adoption, and what that means for competitiveness in an AI-driven economy.

**MODERATOR**

**Mr. Leslie Rowlands**

Managing Partner, Gallup Inc., UK

**FORMAT**

- Presentation of global data and insights on AI adoption, drawing on Gallup's latest research.
- Participants work in groups to share experiences and map key policy choices for turning AI adoption into competitiveness gains.

- Moderated conversation when each group shares 1–2 key insights surfaced in their discussion.

**12:45 PM** **Lunch Break** (Room: Banquet Lobby) 60 min

**1:45 PM** **Talent for the AI Economy: A Call to Action** 15 min

As AI reshapes industries and labor markets, preparing a workforce equipped to thrive in this new economy has become an urgent priority. This session presents the GFCC's call to action on building talent pipelines and capabilities for the AI economy.

SPEAKER

**Dr. Roberto Alvarez**

Executive Director, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Brazil

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Dr. Elaine Rodriguez**

Director of Operations, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), USA

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**2:00 PM** BREAKOUT SESSION 80 min

## From Insight to Coalition: Activating the Human Edge Agenda

Over the past year, the GFCC has focused on a central question: how can we strengthen human capacity and agency in the age of AI? This work led to The Human Edge: Global Perspectives on AI and Prosperity, developed with input from leaders across 32 nations.

Building on the report, Prof. Aleks Subic (Vice-Chancelor and Chief Executive, Torrens University), who chairs the task force that originated the "The Human Edge", outlined additional ideas for how the GFCC can move from insight to action and mobilize its members around a practical agenda.

In this interactive session, participants will work in small groups to

map what the GFCC community is already doing across the world to shape a human centered AI transition and explore potential member-led initiatives the GFCC could implement.

**MODERATOR**

**Dr. Roberto Alvarez**

Executive Director, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Brazil

**RAPPORTEURS**

(will report back on their groups' discussions)

**Mr. Richard Billingham**

Chief Operating Officer, Aston University, UK

**C. Derek Campbell**

Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), USA

**Ms. Athina Chatzipetrou**

Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Greece

**Mr. Chad Evans**

Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Council on Competitiveness (GFCC); Board Treasurer, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils, USA

**Mr. Erion Isufi**

CEO & Founder, Landmark Communications, Albania

**FORMAT**

- 5 min — Framing. Brief overview of the letter's key asks and initiatives, grounding the room before breakout discussion.
- 25 min — Breakout groups. Tables of 4–6 participants work through the discussion questions together, with a notetaker at each table capturing responses.
- 30 min — Report-back. Each table shares 1–2 examples of efforts to enable a human centered AI transition, connections with potential GFCC initiatives, interests, or contacts surfaced in their discussion.
- 20 min — Synthesis & next steps. GFCC staff summarize themes across tables and confirm follow-up: contacts collected will be compiled and initiatives with member interest will be tracked for future coordination.

- 30 min — Report-back. Each table shares 1–2 examples of efforts to enable a human centered AI transition, connections with potential GFCC initiatives, interests, or contacts surfaced in their discussion.
- 20 min — Synthesis & next steps. GFCC staff summarize themes across tables and confirm follow-up: contacts collected will be compiled and initiatives with member interest will be tracked for future coordination.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What is your organization doing to shape a human centered AI transition?
- How do those efforts connect with the initiatives outlined as potential outcomes of "The Human Edge"?
- Which initiatives would you be interested in pursuing and resourcing?
- Who are the relevant contact people within your organization for this work?

**3:20 PM** MODERATED DISCUSSION 50 min

## Future Perspectives for Competitiveness Strategies

Competitiveness strategies developed in previous decades are increasingly challenged by new realities. Artificial intelligence, energy transitions, demographic shifts, supply chain realignment and geopolitical competition are changing the rules of the game. This session will explore how competitiveness strategies must evolve to remain effective.

**MODERATOR**

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**KICK-OFF DISCUSSANTS**

**Mr. Simos Anastasopoulos**

President, Council on Competitiveness of Greece- CompeteGR, Greece

**Mr. Alastair Dawes**

Director of Business Development and Knowledge Exchange, Harper Adams University, UK

**Ms. Riko Hojo**

Chief of the Strategic International Collaborative Research Program, Department of International Affairs, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), Japan

**Dr. Douglas Muzimba**

Chief Economist, National Competitiveness Commission, Zimbabwe

**Ms. Plamena Nenkova**

Deputy Executive Director of International Affairs & Sustainable Development, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**Prof. Takashi Inutsuka**

Executive Director, Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI), Japan

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What should competitiveness strategies look like in 2035?
- What capabilities will matter most?
- How should governments, universities and industry collaborate?
- Which investments deserve priority attention?

## 4:10 PM Invitation to the GFCC Study Trip to Tsukuba, Japan

50 min

The GFCC University and Research Leadership Forum Study Trip continues in 2027 with a visit to Tsukuba, Japan, one of the world's leading science cities. We will share highlights of the program and invite GFCC members and fellows to join.

SPEAKERS

**Prof. Takashi Inutsuka**

Executive Director, Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI) & Specially Appointed Professor, University of Tsukuba, Japan

**Dr. Maya Okamoto**

Senior Fellow, Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI) & Co-Founder & CEO, Nocturne Capital, Japan

**4:15 PM** **Closing Remarks** 15 min

SPEAKERS

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), USA

**4:30 PM** **Adjourn**

# Welcome Reception

National Museum of Archeology

19 Oct, 2026

**6:30 PM** **Welcome Reception** 2 hr

# Global Innovation Summit

Royal Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel

20 Oct, 2026

**8:30 AM** — **Registration and Networking Breakfast** — 30 min

(Room: Art Gallery - Ground Floor)

**9:00 AM** — **Welcome Remarks** — 15 min

SPEAKERS

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Mr. Ivan Mihaylov**

Chief Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, Bulgaria

**Mr. Kalin Peshov**

Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**9:15 AM** — KEYNOTE — 15 min

## Investing in Bulgaria's Future and Competitiveness

Special address by

**H.E. Alexander Pulev**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, Investments and Industry, Republic of Bulgaria

**9:30 AM** — PANEL — 45 min

## Powering Competitiveness in a Fragmented World

Economic growth, geopolitical tensions, technological disruption and the race for strategic capabilities are reshaping competitiveness across the globe. Nations are increasingly focused on resilience, energy security, infrastructure modernization and technological sovereignty as a way to build the critical capabilities needed to remain competitive over the next decade. This panel brings together global and national perspectives to examine how countries can build resilient, future-

ready growth strategies in an era of fragmentation and disruption.

**MODERATOR**

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**PANELISTS**

**Prof. Sir Ian Greer**

President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Mr. Ivan Mihaylov**

Chief Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, Bulgaria

**Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe**

Deputy Director-General for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships, Department of Science, Technology & Innovation - South Africa, South Africa

**Mr. Dimitar Tsotsorkov**

Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Asarel-Medet JSC, Bulgaria

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What will determine competitiveness over the next decade?
- How are geopolitical shifts influencing economic strategy?
- Which capabilities should nations prioritize?

**10:15 AM** KEYNOTE + FIRESIDE CHAT 30 min

## Southeast Europe on the Global Stage: A Competitiveness Snapshot

Where does Southeast Europe stand in the global competitiveness landscape — and where is it headed? Drawing on Gallup's latest data, Preslav Tonkov opens the summit with a frank, evidence-based assessment of the region's economic strengths, structural challenges, and the indicators that will define its trajectory in the decade ahead.

**INTERVIEWER**

**Dr. Roberto Alvarez**

Executive Director, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Brazil

GUEST

**Mr. Preslav Tonkov**

Senior Advisor, Global Analytics, Gallup, UK

**10:45 AM** PANEL 45 min

## Energy Security and Independence: Building Resilient Economies

Energy security has become one of the defining competitiveness challenges of the decade — a driver not only of economic growth and prosperity, but of geopolitical stability. This session explores how countries can diversify energy sources, strengthen resilience and translate reliable, affordable energy into broader economic and strategic advantage.

MODERATOR

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

PANELISTS

**Dr. Fahad R. S. Al Jahwari**

Director, National Competitiveness Office, Oman

**Ir. Mohamed Firouz Asnan, FASc**

President, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Malaysia

**Ms. Athina Chatzipetrou**

Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Greece

**Mr. Boyan Rashev**

Founder, Mind Your Future, Bulgaria

**Mr. Kiril Ravnachki**

Executive Director, Bulgartransgaz EAD, Bulgaria

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What lessons have emerged from recent energy disruptions?
- How can countries balance affordability, security and sustainability?
- What role can regional cooperational play?

**11:30 AM** KEYNOTE 15 min

## Bulgaria's Digital and Innovation Agenda

Special address by

**Ms. Mira Yosifova**

Deputy Minister of Innovation and Digital Transformation of the Republic of Bulgaria

**11:45 AM** PANEL 45 min

## Powering the Future Economy: Investment, Energy Innovation, and Workforce Readiness

Aging infrastructure, the rise of AI, growing electricity demand, the reconfiguration of power systems, and digital technologies in general are forcing countries to rethink energy systems. Modernization at this scale requires more than government funding alone and a workforce equipped to operate increasingly digital, interconnected systems. This session explores how countries and companies are tackling both the capital and the talent gap needed to build resilient, future-ready energy systems and economies.

**MODERATOR**

**Dr. Paul Madden**

CEO, Centre for Competitiveness, UK

**PANELISTS**

**Dr. Christopher Allen**

Former Resident Economic Advisor to the European Commission in Athens (2015-2024), Greece

**Prof. Razvan Bologa**

Innovation Coordinator and Professor at the Computer Science Department, Bucharest University of Economic Studies – ASE; CEO and Founder , Nextlab.tech, Romania

**Mr. Anuar Buranbayev**

Partner, Center for Research & Consulting LLC, Kazakhstan

**Ms. Sandra Duxbury**

Investor and Consultant, Canada

**Professor Ir. Dr. Lau Kok Keong**

Director of the Institute of Regenerative Futures, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Malaysia

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What Investments are most critical for grid modernization?
- What financing models are proving effective for grid infrastructure at scale?
- How can we ensure the workforce is ready to operate these new digital, integrated systems?

**12:30 PM** KEYNOTE — 15 min

## Powering Bulgaria's Energy Security

Special address by the Minister of Energy. **Room: Royal Hall**

**SPEAKERS**

**H.E. Iva Petrova**
Minister of Energy of the Republic of Bulgaria

**12:45 PM** — 15 min

## GFCC 2026 Call-to-Action Launch

**SPEAKERS**

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**
Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**
Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**1:00 PM** — 10 min

## Ceremonial Signing of South Africa's membership in the GFCC

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**
Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe**
Deputy Director-General for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships, Department of Science, Technology & Innovation - South Africa, South Africa

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**
Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**1:10 PM** **Lunch** (Room: Royal 1) 40 min

**1:50 PM** PANEL 45 min

## Infrastructure as Competitive Advantage

(Room: Pirin Banquet)

World-class infrastructure is not just a prerequisite for competitiveness, it is a source of competitive advantage in its own right, shaping where investment, talent, and industry choose to locate and how efficiently goods, data, and energy move across an economy. Yet building it remains a persistent challenge for many nations, given the scale of capital required, long project timelines, and the difficulty of coordinating across public and private stakeholders. This session explores the critical role of transportation, logistics, energy systems, digital connectivity and innovation districts as engines of growth, and strategies to overcome setbacks when planning for the next decade.

**MODERATOR**

**Mr. Chad Evans**

Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Council on Competitiveness; Board Treasurer, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), USA

**PANELISTS**

**The Hon. Jerry Hultin**

Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), USA

**Prof. Edward C. Wingenbach**

President, The American College of Greece, Greece

**Dr. Nkem Khumbah**

Director, STI Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, African Academy of Science, Kenya

**Prof. Götz Veser**

Professor & Director of the Covestro Circular Economy Program, University of Pittsburgh, USA

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Which infrastructure investments generate the greatest returns?
- How can public-private partnerships be strengthened?
- How can countires improve investment absorption?

**2:35 PM** FIRESIDE CHAT 30 min

## The Future of European Competitiveness

A keynote examining Europe's competitiveness challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing global environment.

**INTERVIEWER**

**Mr. Kalin Marinov**

Head of the International Relations and Strategic Development Department, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**GUESTS**

**Ms. Svetoslava Georgieva**

Chair of the Board of Directors, European Innovation Council (EIC) Fund, Bulgaria

**Mr. Ruslan Strefanov**

General Manager, ARC Consulting EOOD/Applied Research and Communications Fund, Bulgaria

**3:05 PM** PANEL 45 min

## AI and Digital Innovation: Competing in the Intelligence Economy

Artificial intelligence is emerging as a defining competitiveness differentiator, but capturing its advantages depends less on the technology itself than on institutional readiness, policy-making, and sustained investment in human capability. This session brings together perspectives on market insertion, governance, and workforce transformation to explore what it takes for nations to compete in the AI economy.

**MODERATOR**

**Dr. Roberto Alvarez**

Executive Director, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Brazil

**PANELISTS**

**Mr. Richard Billingham**

Chief Operating Officer, Aston University, UK

**Mr. Elvin Guri**

CEO & Managing Partner, INVENIO Partners, Bulgaria

**Mr. Erion Isufi**

CEO & Founder, Landmark Communications, Albania

**Mr. Borislav Petrov**

Executive Director, Institute for Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Technology (INSAIT), Bulgaria

**Ms. Jennifer Steel**

Associate Vice President for Government Affairs, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- How can countries accelerate AI adoption?
- What policies best support innovation while managing risks?
- How should societies prepare for the future of work?

**3:50 PM** PANEL 45 min

## Nuclear and Next-Generation Energy

Long constrained by cost, public perception, and regulatory caution, nuclear energy is reemerging as an option for countries seeking reliable, low-carbon power and more independence from volatile global energy markets. Advances in technology have eased safety concerns that once held the technology back, while geopolitical disruptions have exposed the risks of relying too heavily on a narrow set of energy sources and suppliers. As a result, nations are increasingly turning to nuclear and other next-generation technologies as a matter of both energy security and competitiveness.

**MODERATOR**

**Ms. Plamena Nenkova**

Deputy Executive Director of International Affairs & Sustainable Development, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**PANELISTS**

**Dr. Brian B. Anderson**

Director of the Office of Institutional Strategic Planning, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, USA

**Ms. Deborah Gordon**

Senior Advisor, Longview Fusion Energy Systems, USA

**Mr. Andon Ichev**

Executive Director, BlueBird Energy, Bulgaria

**Prof. Miguel Athayde Marques**

Vice-Rector for Infrastructural and Strategic Development and Professor of Management, Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Portugal

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What role should nuclear energy play?
- How close are SMRs to deployment?
- Which next-generation technologies hold the greatest promise?

**4:35 PM** PANEL 45 min

## Competitiveness Frontiers: From Strategy to Impact

Many countries have developed ambitious competitiveness and innovation strategies, yet execution remains the harder challenge. This panel moves beyond strategy design to examine what separates successful implementation from stalled ambition, drawing on practitioner experience to identify the institutional structures, incentives, and metrics that turn competitiveness agendas into tangible economic impact.

**MODERATOR**

**Mr. Eldar Abdrazakov**

Founder, Kazakhstan Growth Forum, Kazakhstan

**PANELISTS**

**Mr. Simos Anastasopoulos**

President, Council on Competitiveness of Greece - CompeteGR, Greece

**Mr. Lulzim Basha**

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Interior, and Mayor of Tirana, Albania

**Mr. Martin Danovsky**

Executive Director, Sofia Tech Park, Bulgaria

**Dr. Michinari Hamaguchi**

Counselor to the President, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), Japan

**Dr. Bernadett Petri**

Managing Director, Hungarian Development Promotion Office, Hungary

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Why do some competitiveness strategies succeed while others fail?
- How can innovation ecosystems become more effective?
- What should be measured to ensure impact?

**5:20 PM** PANEL 25 min

## The Next Decade of Competitiveness

A forward-looking discussion reflecting on the major themes emerging from the Summit and identifying priorities for governments, universities, and businesses.

**MODERATOR**

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

**PANELISTS**

**Mr. Christopher Geiger**

Vice President, Internal Audit and Enterprise Risk, Lockheed Martin Corporation, USA

**Prof. Isabel Gil**

Rector, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Portugal

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Mr. Kalin Peshov**

Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**Mr. Symeon Tsomokos**

President, Delphi Economic Forum, Greece

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What will define successful economies in 2035?
- Which risks deserve greater attention?
- Where should leaders focus their efforts?

## 5:45 PM Event Closing

15 min

**SPEAKERS**

**Mr. Charles O. (Chad) Holliday**

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) & Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions, USA

**Mr. Ivan Mihaylov**

Chief Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, Bulgaria

**Mr. Kalin Peshov**

Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS), Bulgaria

**Mr. Symeon Tsomokos**

President, Delphi Economic Forum, Greece

**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**

Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC); President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

## 6:00 PM Adjourn

## Networking Cocktail

Banquet Lobby, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel

20 Oct, 2026

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6:00 PM | Networking Cocktail | |

## Gala Dinner

Sredets Hall, Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel

20 Oct, 2026

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|---|---|---|
| 7:00 PM | Check in and Seating | 30 min |
| 7:30 PM | Dinner, 2026 Global Competitiveness Awards, and More | 2h 30 min |
| 10:00 PM | Event Adjourns | |

## Site Visits: Sofia

Sofia Balkan Palace Hotel

21 Oct, 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 9:30 AM | Bus departs from Sofia Balkan Palace |
| 10:00 AM | Visit to Sofia Tech Park (INSAIT and more) |
| 12:00 PM | Lunch |
| 1:00 PM | Visit to Industrial Sites (EnduroSat Space Center and Payhawk) |
| 4:30 PM | Drop-off at Sofia Balkan Palace |

# Site Visits: Plovdiv

Sofia Balkan Palace

22 Oct, 2026

**8:00 AM** — **Bus departs from Sofia Balkan Palace**

**9:30 AM** — **Visit to GBS Prefab Plant**

**11:00 AM** — **Visit to Trakia Economic Zone (TEZ)**

**1:00 PM** — **Lunch and Sightseeing (please check the Annex for recommended cultural and culinary experiences in Plovdiv)**

**4:00 PM** — **Choose one:**

- Drive back to Sofia (approx. 90-minute drive), or
- Hotel check-in in Plovdiv, followed by a free evening

**FOR GUESTS STAYING OVERNIGHT IN PLOVDIV**

The return bus departs from the DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center at 11:00 AM on October 23, with planned stops at the airport and a final stop at Sofia Balkan Palace.

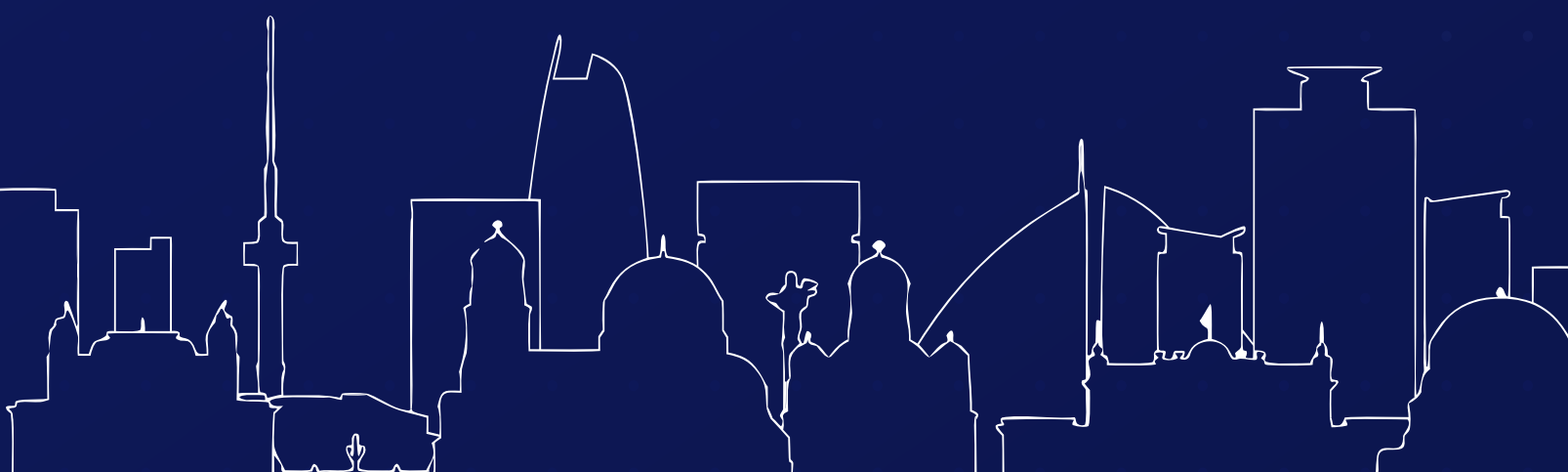
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# SPEAKER BIOS



# Speaker Bios

## Eldar Abdrazakov



Founder, Kazakhstan Growth Forum
Founder & CEO, Centras Group
Kazakhstan

Eldar Abdrazakov is Founder & CEO of the Centras Group. Centras is a Kazakhstan's leading investment & insurance firm. Centras commands Top3 position in retail insurance distribution and expands its digital services in Mobility, Property, Health & Wealth.
Prior to founding Centras at 2004, Eldar was Head of Wholesale & Investment Banking at Kazkommertsbank, then Kazakhstan's largest bank, and CEO at Kazkommerts Securities. Abdrazakov joined the bank as an international banking officer in 1995.
Eldar serves on the Boards of Directors at the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange, Air Astana. He chairs the Kazakhstan Competitiveness Council and a member of Advisory Board of Harvard University's Davis Center on Russia & Eurasia. Ex-Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Forte Bank JCS and YPO Kazakhstan.
Eldar Abdrazakov graduated from Yassawi University, Kazakhstan and competed Harvard Business School's General Management Program (GMP8). Also in February 2023 Eldar Abdrazakov received the status Chartered Director of the UK's Institute of Directors. In 2024 launched world famous quick service restaurant chain Popeyes in Kazakhstan.

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## Dr. Fahad Rashid Al Jahwari



Director, National Competitiveness Office
Ministry of Economy
Oman

Dr. Fahad Rashid Al Jahwari is Director of the National Competitiveness Office at the Ministry of Economy, Sultanate of Oman. He has more than 17 years of government experience in economic policy, global competitiveness indices, engagement with international organizations, strategic planning, and cross-government coordination.
In his current role, he leads national efforts to strengthen Oman's performance in major global competitiveness and development indices, working closely with government institutions and international organizations in support of Oman Vision 2040.
Dr. Al Jahwari holds a PhD in Social Policy from the University of Sheffield, UK, and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in International Human Resource Management from the UK. His professional and research interests include competitiveness, innovation, human capital, labour-market policy, international organizations, and global development frameworks.

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## Dr. Christopher Allen



Former Resident Economic Advisor to the European Commission in Athens (2015-2024)
Greece

Chris Allen is a member of the GFCC and a Senior Adviser to the European Policy Centre. He is working on a possible EU-Africa Energy and Climate Partnership, developing AI-related skills policies, and researching policy indicators for EU brain health policy. He was previously a senior EU official who served as European Commission Economic Representative in Athens for the European Commission (2015-24), playing an important role in the completion of the Greek crisis adjustment program. He was earlier responsible for EU industrial and technology policy and worked on international climate change negotiations. Prior to joining the Commission, he was the Head of Economic Forecasting at the European Central Bank and a university lecturer in Economics in the UK and the Netherlands.

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## Dr. Roberto Alvarez



Executive Director
Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
Brazil

Roberto Alvarez is a systems thinker and doer with over 25 years of experience at the intersection of technology, business and policy. A native of Brazil, he is a community builder who has worked with and implemented joint initiatives alongside organizations and partners in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania throughout his career.
As Executive Director at the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), Roberto oversees the organization's policy portfolio and operations, engages with global leaders across the GFCC network in 35+ countries to conceptualize and develop new initiatives, builds global partnerships, creates content on innovation and competitiveness strategy and leads the GFCC team. Roberto is also a Senior Policy Fellow at Queen Mary University of London Global Policy Institute and an active early-stage tech investor. He is a Venture Partner at NYC-based Seldor Capital, one of the first space-tech VCs worldwide, helping transform state-of-the-art technologies into high-impact businesses. He is an Industry 4.0 advisor to Bossa Nova Investments, the most active micro-VC company in LatAm, and the founder of Aventures, an early-stage investment company in Brazil that invests in cleantech and AI. Roberto is also part of the team behind FrissOn Capital, an early-stage VC company focused on deep tech ventures in LatAm. He has been involved in over 25 early-stage deals in various countries.
Roberto's career includes senior management positions at the Brazilian Agency for Industrial Development (ABDI), business consulting (manufacturing and logistics), tech entrepreneurship, higher education and civil society organizations. He has authored and organized books and publications on innovation, industrial development and manufacturing strategy and operations. Roberto holds a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from COPPE-UFRJ and was trained in Quality and Productivity at the Japan Productivity Center, as well as Exponential Technologies at the NASA

Ames-based Singularity University. He is a certified coach in exponential organizations.

## Simos Anastasopoulos



President, Council on Competitiveness of Greece (CompeteGR)
Chairman & CEO, PETSIAVAS S.A.
Greece

Simos Anastasopoulos is a graduate of the Department of Electrical Engineering of the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), and holds a Master of Science Degree in Mechanical/ Automotive Engineering from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.
After his studies in Michigan, he worked for two years at General Motors Corporation as a Development Engineer at the Milford Proving Ground. In 1986 he returned to Greece, and after completion of his military service, he joined PETSIAVAS S.A. Since 2002 he had been the Managing Director of the company and in 2013 was named Chairman and CEO of PETSIAVAS S.A. Since July 2020, he is President of Associations of S.A. & Entrepreneurship. He is the elected President of the Council on Competitiveness of Greece, since its foundation in 2018. He is also a member of the Board of the Pan-Hellenic Association of Pharmaceutical Industries and member of the General Council of SEV Hellenic Federation of Enterprises. Since June 2019, he is President Emeritus of the American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce after a tenure of 6 years as the elected President. Simos Anastasopoulos was born in Athens in 1957, is married to Peggy Petsiavas and has two daughters.

## Dr. Brian B. Anderson



Director, Office of Institutional Strategic Planning
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
USA

As Director of ORNL's Office of Institutional Strategic Planning, Dr. Brian Anderson provides leadership for institutional S&T strategies, resourcing, and discretionary investments. He also manages the Lab Directed Research and Development (LDRD) program and Research Library. From 2020 to 2026, Dr. Anderson served as the Director of the Enrichment Science & Engineering Division in ORNL's Isotope Science and Enrichment Directorate. In this capacity, he served as inaugural director, developing sustainable R&D programs that supported enrichment technology development and deployment for the nation; leading the development of new technologies and capital projects, and establishing the leadership structure for organizational growth.From 2019 to 2020, Dr. Anderson served on special assignment assessing ORNL's enrichment science programs. In this role, he led a multi-directorate team in developing a long-term enrichment technology R&D strategy for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration's Defense Fuels Program, which will enable deployment of domestic uranium enrichment capacity at scale for defense

needs. From 2013 to 2019, he led the Nuclear Security Advanced Technologies Group, and served as Deputy Division Director for Science and Technology supporting the Nuclear Security and Isotope Technology division in 2018. Dr. Anderson joined ORNL in 2010 where he worked to advance ORNL's nuclear forensic science capabilities. He founded ORNL's Ultra-trace Forensic Science Center in 2011 and managed the center until 2019. As both principal investigator and co-principal investigator, he has directed numerous scientific programs for DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration.
Before joining ORNL, Dr. Anderson served as a Senior Fellow Scientist in the Nonproliferation Technologies Section at Savannah River National Laboratory and as a Principal Research Scientist at Cargill, Incorporated.
He holds a master's and doctoral degree in analytical chemistry from the University of Washington and a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Central Washington University. He also holds a joint appointment as an associate professor at the University of Tennessee's Bredesen Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Education.

## Ir. Mohamed Firouz Asnan



President, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP)
Malaysia

Ir. Mohamed Firouz Asnan became Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP)'s first President on May 1, 2025, following six years of strategic stewardship on the university's Board. He brings with him over 35 years of industry experience at PETRONAS, where he held several senior leadership roles across the energy value chain — from upstream to downstream — as well as pivotal positions at the corporate centre. His extensive international experience across diverse cultures has equipped him with a unique perspective and the ability to lead in dynamic, complex environments.
Over the course of his distinguished career, Ir. Firouz served as Senior Vice President, Malaysia Petroleum Management (MPM) — the regulatory arm of PETRONAS — where he was entrusted with the national mandate to maximise the long-term value of Malaysia's hydrocarbon resources. During his tenure at MPM, the upstream sector in Malaysia experienced a renaissance with the revitalisation of exploration activities. By the end of 2023, Malaysia not only reversed the production decline trend but also established itself as a leading oil and gas producer in the region, successfully achieving its 2025 upstream ambition target of 2 million barrels of oil equivalent (boe) per day ahead of schedule. Additionally, the upstream sector has significantly reduced its carbon footprint.
In addition, Ir. Firouz held the position of Senior Vice President, Corporate Strategy and was a member of PETRONAS' Executive Leadership Team, developing long-term strategies to future-proof the organisation. His appointment as President marks a transformative chapter for UTP as it launches the Full Potential Program (UFPP) to become a world-class institution. Ir. Firouz combines strategic vision, business acumen, and hands-on leadership with a passion for building capacity and driving

research, innovation, and societal impact. He advocates a whole-industry approach, leveraging technology, partnerships, and collaboration with academia to transform industries and societies, shaping a better future.
Ir. Firouz is a registered Professional Engineer and a member of the Institution of Engineers, Malaysia. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) and a Master of Business Administration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a Sloan Fellow. He is also a Fellow of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia. Recently, he was elected as an Executive Board Member of the Vice-Chancellors' Council for Private Universities.

## Lulzim Basha

Former Mayor of Tirana and Minister of Foreign Affairs
Albania



Lulzim Basha graduated in Law at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. He has worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and as a Legal Adviser at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. Transitioning to Albanian politics in 2005, Basha was elected member of Parliament. During the period 2005-2011 he subsequently served as Minister of Public Works and Telecommunications, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Interior.
His achievements include the construction of Albania's largest infrastructure project, the Durres-Kukes highway, implementation of the integrated TIMS system for border control, production of biometric passports, visa-free travel to Schengen countries and Albania's NATO membership. In 2011, Basha was elected Mayor of Tirana, where he continued his ambitious urban development projects and approved the first Urban Plan for Tirana in decades. As Mayor, Basha masterminded the expansion of the main Boulevard and the rehabilitation of the Tirana River.
Transitioning to party leadership in 2013, he became the first chairman of the Democratic Party elected directly by its members. His leadership has been characterized by his efforts to modernize and democratize internal party processes. Additionally, the establishment of the Foundation for Freedom and Democracy underscores his commitment to nurturing analytical discourse and policy innovation within the party. Basha has also been recognized for his dedication to democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. Throughout his career, he has consistently advocated for transparency, accountability, and good governance, both within Albania and on the international stage. Basha has been an active voice in advocating for Albania's integration into the European Union and fostering closer ties with neighboring countries. His diplomatic insight and dedication to regional cooperation have contributed to Albania's positioning as a key player in the Western Balkans region.

## Richard Billingham

Chief Operating Officer, Aston University
United Kingdom



Richard Billingham is Chief Operating Officer at Aston University, where he leads the University's professional services, digital transformation, estates and capital development activities.
With more than two decades of leadership experience spanning organisational development, transformation, operations and governance, Richard has built a reputation for turning ambitious strategies into practical delivery. He works at the intersection of people, place and performance—helping organisations navigate complexity, build capability and deliver lasting change.
At Aston, Richard is helping to shape the next phase of the University's evolution through the delivery of Aston 2030 and the development of the Birmingham Innovation Precinct, a major initiative bringing together education, research, business and investment to drive economic growth and innovation in the Midlands.
Alongside his executive role, Richard serves as a Non-Executive Director and brings extensive experience of governance, risk and organisational leadership. He is passionate about the role that universities, cities and partnerships can play in creating opportunity, and is committed to ensuring that bold ambitions are matched by credible delivery.
His approach is characterised by curiosity, collaboration and a belief that meaningful transformation happens when strong relationships, clear purpose and disciplined execution come together.

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## Prof. Razvan Bologa

Professor, Department of Computer Science
Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE)
Romania



Professor at the Computer Science Department of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. His research interests include: artificial intelligence, adaptive learning, Industry 4.0, upskilling/reskilling, enterprise systems and cybersecurity.
Professor Bologa is a distinguished expert in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) and educational technologies, having led research projects that explore the integration of AI into educational technologies. His research focuses on areas such as AI-driven education, knowledge management for enterprise competitiveness, and intelligent systems designed to optimize business operations.
Over the following two decades, during which he was active in both national and international private sectors, he gained prominence across several areas. In the construction industry, he was a board member of Portugal's largest construction company, where he also served on the board of one of Europe's largest real estate and construction projects. In hospital management, he was President of the Board of Directors of Hospitalia, and in tourism, he was a board member of the Belver Hotel

Group. Internationally, he sat on numerous boards of directors, particularly for several successful biofuels projects led by businessman Stanley Ho.

## Anuar Buranbayev



Partner, Center for Research and Consulting
Kazakhstan

Anuar is a Partner at Center for Research and Consulting, a Kazakhstan-based think-tank that specializes in public policy research, spatial development policies, strategy development for business and government.
He had experience in upstream oil production, oil service, mining sectors and banking. Anuar was also a Chairman of the Management Board of a state-owned think-tank Kazakhstan Industry Development Institute (now QazIndustry) and lead the research unit in industrial policy. His core competences include spatial research, corporate strategy formulation, building financial management systems and industrial policy.
Anuar holds an MBA from Maastricht School of Management where he specialized in General and Strategic Management. He is currently lecturing at local business school in the field of Strategic Management, Business Policy, General Management.

## C. Derek Campbell



Executive Chairman, LVC Global Holdings Ltd
Distinguished Fellow, GFCC
USA

C. Derek Campbell is an experienced senior executive leader with global business interests across the Energy, Natural Resources, Infrastructure, and Security & Defense sectors. Mr. Campbell is the Executive Chairman of both Emerald Global Resources, an Energy, Natural Resource, and Infrastructure asset acquisition platform, and LVC Global Holdings, a multi-sector asset acquisition and advisory platform. He is also an Executive Director of Seneca Commodities-Zambia, a physical commodities brokerage house and a Distinguished Fellow of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils. Mr. Campbell is a retired Colonel of the United States Marine Corps Reserves, serving with distinction in operational combat tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. He holds a B.S. from the University of Maryland and an M.S.S. from the U.S. Army War College.

## Athina Chatzipetrou



Board Member & NED, ELLAKTOR Group
Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
Greece

Athina Chatzipetrou is an accomplished Independent Non-Executive Director and former CEO and CFO with more than 35 years of leadership across multinational corporations, financial institutions, and public administration.
She currently serves as Board Member and NED at ELLAKTOR Group, where she chairs the Nomination & Remuneration Committee and sits on the Audit and Risk Committee. She is also Partner, Financial Services and Technology, at SIGNIUM Greece.
As President and CEO of the Hellenic Development Bank, she led one of the most significant financial transformations in Greece, scaling assets under management from €280M to €10.5B, supporting over 43,000 businesses, and contributing €7.7B to national GDP.
Her corporate career includes senior financial leadership roles at Johnson & Johnson, as Finance Controller; Coca-Cola, as Region Finance Manager for Greece, Cyprus, and the Balkans; Beiersdorf (Nivea), as Finance Director for BDF and tesa; and Toyota, as Group CFO for nine legal entities. Her consulting expertise includes four years as a Consultant at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and two years as Regional Advisor at the RVO (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland), the Netherlands Enterprise Agency operating under the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy.

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## Martin Danovsky



Executive Director, Sofia Tech Park
Bulgaria

Martin Danovski is a distinguished expert in economics, innovation, and EU fund management, with over 15 years of experience in both the public and private sectors. As Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Innovation and Growth (2025), he was responsible for strategic planning and coordination of policies related to research, innovation, and smart specialization.
Prior to his current role, Danovski served as Chairman of the Management Board of the Fund Manager of Financial Instruments in Bulgaria (Fund of Funds), overseeing investments supporting SMEs, innovation, and energy efficiency. He also held the position of Chairman of the State Agency for Research and Innovation, contributing to the development of national research infrastructure. His educational background includes master's degrees in economics, marketing, and strategic planning from the University of National and World Economy, as well as in engineering and technical sciences from the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy.

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## Alastair Dawes



Director of Business Development and Knowledge Exchange
Harper Adams University
United Kingdom

Alastair Dawes is an entrepreneurial academic leader specialising in business development, knowledge exchange and regional innovation. He brings extensive experience of building strategic partnerships across industry, government and higher education, translating shared ambitions into sustainable programmes that deliver economic, institutional and societal impact. Alastair's expertise includes strategic planning, investment and bid development, consultancy, digital innovation and the commercialisation of ideas. Throughout his career, he has led complex externally funded programmes, secured investment for growth-focused initiatives and developed partnerships that support innovation, productivity, job creation and regional economic development.
His combination of academic credibility, commercial judgement and practical delivery experience enables him to align institutional capabilities with the needs of businesses and public-sector partners. He has also led organisational change and contributed to the development of employability, apprenticeships, enterprise and professional capability.
As Director of Business Development and Knowledge Exchange at Harper Adams University, Alastair leads the development of external partnerships, expands knowledge exchange activity and strengthens the University's engagement with industry, policymakers and regional stakeholders.

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## Sandra Duxbury



Investor and Consultant
Canada

Sandra Duxbury is an investor and consultant following a successful career in the public service in Alberta Canada.
Sandra has led and supported strategic policy development and programs for numerous provincial Ministries, including Alberta Advanced Education, Research and Innovation, Economic Development, Executive Council, Health and Environment. By engaging the public and stakeholders in finding acceptable solutions for complex challenges related to environment, community and resource development, she built deep expertise in sustainable development and achieving transformational systemic change for improved outcomes.
Often this work required the development of new organizational capability and culture, such as introduction of innovative information systems, business processes and strategic foresight. It also involved collaborating across the public and private sectors, research agencies and post-secondary institutions to advance priorities and develop solid data foundations for evidence-informed policy and measuring outcomes. A highlight example is the catalyzation of Canadian participation in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study, shining light on comparative entrepreneurial activity.

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She holds a Masters of Public Administration from Queen's University (Kingston) focused on developing leadership for public sector innovation and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Alberta.
She has twice attended GIS in London, including participation in the inaugural University and Research Leader's Forum, as well as in Belfast. She is proud to have been a lynchpin in hosting the GFCC Global Innovation Summit in Banff, Canada.

## Chad Evans



Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Council on Competitiveness
Treasurer, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
USA

As Council EVP and COO overseeing all programs and initiatives, Chad develops and manages the Council's policy agenda and workstream, including: development and execution of the Council's flagship "National Commission on Innovation & Competitiveness Frontiers" and "Competitiveness Conversations Across America" series; creating both the "Building University-Industry-Lab Dialogue for Advanced Computing" effort and the "Exploring Innovation Frontiers Initiative" with the National Science Foundation; forming the "American Energy & Manufacturing Competitiveness Partnership" with the U.S. Department of Energy; and, helping to shape and launch the "National Engineering Forum."
In addition, Chad has built and shepherded over the past nearly 15 years the Council's "Technology Leadership and Strategy Initiative," engaging Fortune 500 chief technology officers, university vice presidents of research, and national laboratory deputy directors to make the policy and business cases for America's innovation-enabling investments in talent, technology and infrastructure.
He has also helmed C-suite innovation summits, dialogues and immersions across Latin America, Europe, Asia and Oceania. Has focused, in particular in Brazil and Australia - having created 4 U.S.-Brazil Innovation Summits and 20+ innovation learning laboratories across both nations; and having launched the first-ever U.S.-Australia CTO Dialogue series.
Chad holds an M.S. from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, with an Honors concentration in International Business Diplomacy from Georgetown's Landegger Program. He has a B.A. in Political Science and International Affairs from Emory University.
He is both Secretary and Treasurer to the Board of the Council on Competitiveness; Treasurer to the Board of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils; a member of the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station Advisory Board; an ARCS Foundation National Science and Engineering Advisory Council member; a U.S. German Marshall Fund Fellow; and a past member of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Industry Advisory Council and the World Economic Forum Advisory Board on Russian Competitiveness.

## Christopher Geiger



Vice President, Internal Audit and Enterprise Risk, Lockheed Martin Corporation
USA

Christopher Geiger is Chief Audit Executive and head of enterprise risk for Lockheed Martin. He has been with the company for over 25 years with previous leadership roles in engineering and sustainability. Mr. Geiger is on the board of Midflorida Credit Union, a retail financial institution, and the International Academy of Astronautics, promoting international cooperation in the advancement of space development and exploration. He frequently publishes and speaks on how the intersection of finance, growth, and technology create lasting value.

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## Svetoslava Georgieva



Chair of the Board of Directors, European Innovation Council (EIC) Fund
Bulgaria

Svetoslava Georgieva has a broad range of experience in finance, both in the public and the private sector.
She is one of the four permanent members of the Investment Committee of InvestEU, the European Commission's programme that aims to mobilise more than €372 billion in investments in Europe by 2027. She was the representative of the Bulgarian government in the Contributors' Committee of the Pan-European Guarantee Fund (EGF) managed by the EIB Group and established in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to support EU-based companies affected by the crisis. She was the executive director and member of the management board of the Fund of Funds in Bulgaria, which manages a portfolio of c. EUR 600 million of debt and equity mandates financed by the European structural funds. During this time she was responsible for the establishment, fund manager selection and oversight of five VC funds, three debt funds and two risk-sharing mandates in the area of infrastructure and micro finance.
Prior to that, she gained international experience in finance and in the European institutions. She worked in investment banking and equity investments in London, and in the European Commission in Brussels, in EU economic surveillance and state aid, on key reforms in the banking sector in Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Bulgaria. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Economics and East European studies from University College London (UCL) and a master's degree from ESCP Business School in London and Paris.

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## Isabel Gil



Rector, Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP)
President, International Federation of Catholic Universities
Portugal

Isabel Maria de Oliveira Capeloa Gil is the President of Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP) and has been elected in July of 2018 as President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU). Previously, she was Vice-Rector for Research and Internationalization (2012-2016) and the Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences (2005-2012) at UCP and Full Professor of Culture Studies at the Faculty of Human Sciences at UCP. She studied in Lisbon (U. Lisbon), Munich (Ludwig Maximilian University) and Chicago and holds a PhD in German Studies from UCP. Having grown up in Asia (Macao), Isabel Gil has been especially interested in researching issues of diversity and conflict and has structured her work around the exploration of the disciplinary boundaries between literature, the arts and other disciplines.
She is a passionate advocate of international education and works consistently to develop international research networks, exploring the different ways in which the practice of the arts and humanities is pivotal to advance a more sustainable and intellectually robust global education agenda. Her research is currently published in Portuguese, English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish. She is the author of over 140 publications, bridging cultural theory, interarts studies, visual culture, culture and conflict and her work has been published in New German Critique, Dedalus or Colloquia Germanica, amongst many other journals. She was a founding member and is a senior researcher at the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC), where she coordinated the research group Culture, Art and Citizenship (CULTCIT). Isabel Gil is furthermore Honorary Fellow at the IGRS, School of Advanced Studies, University of London and holds a position as Invited Professor at Universidade de São José (Macao). An advocate of strengthening doctoral education, she has been involved with the Council for Doctoral Education at the European University Association.

## Deborah C. Gordon



Senior Advisor, Longview Fusion Energy Systems
Senior Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
USA

Deborah C. Gordon is a Senior Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils. Gordon serves as a Senior Advisor to Longview Fusion Energy Systems, Inc. and several other high technology companies where she helps them bridge the gap in understanding between science, industry and government institutions. She is an Affiliate at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University from which she retired in August 2019 after 22 years where she served as the Executive Director, Stanford-Harvard Preventive Defense Project, co-directed by Sec. William Perry and Sec. Ashton Carter. In this role, Ms. Gordon participated in the highest-level interactions with political and military leaders around the world. Her expertise is in promoting highly informed, non-governmental dialogues, known as track-two diplomacy, to provide opportunities for international innovation, agreement and cooperation. The Preventive

Defense team devised creative and innovative policy approaches to U.S. defense policy and communicated them directly to high-level government officials. Gordon has over 40 years of experience in algorithm design, signal processing, network design, and network security and holds several U.S. and Canadian patents. She is the former Mayor of Woodside, CA and served 17 years on the Woodside Town Council; Chair and Director, City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County; and Chair for many San Mateo County and California State policy advisory bodies including for energy and water policy. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Council on Strategic Risks, Arms Control Association, and Probability Management. Gordon is a founder and director (emerita) of the Institute for Security and Technology. She holds a BS in computer science from the University of Southern California.

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## Professor Sir Ian Greer DL FMedSci

President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast
Northern Ireland



Sir Ian has been President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast since August 2018. He has extensive experience of university innovation driving regional economic growth. This includes cross-sector developments both in Northern Ireland and England, and specifically the Belfast Region City Deal Innovation Pillar, driving innovation in key sectors for the local economy, such as health innovation, data science & analytics, and advanced manufacturing. He is passionate about the importance of social responsibility and inclusion to the University's mission, particularly widening participation, diversity & inclusion and civic engagement.
He is a strong advocate for collaboration across and between sectors. His leadership has developed or expanded partnerships across the island of Ireland, the UK, the Middle East and the USA. He Is a past President of Universities Ireland, promoting collaboration across the island, a member of the British Council's Education Advisory Group, Founder of both the Health Innovation Research Alliance, Northern Ireland (HIRANI) and the Northern Health Science Alliance, and non-executive Director of Dubai Academic Health Corporation. He is a Deputy Lieutenant of the County Borough of Belfast. By way of background, he is a medical graduate of the University of Glasgow, with his research and clinical career in obstetrics & gynaecology, where he was recognised as an international authority on pregnancy complications, particularly thrombotic problems. He has published over 400 Publications including 14 Books and 28 Clinical Guidelines He has held senior leadership positions in several UK Universities, and was Vice-President of the University of Manchester, immediately before moving to Queen's. He was made a Knight Bachelor in the King's Birthday Honours 2023 for services to education and the economy.

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## Elvin Guri

CEO & Managing Partner, INVENIO Partners
Bulgaria



Mr. Elvin Guri is an entrepreneur, investor, and philanthropist. Currently CEO of Invenio Partners, which manages several private equity funds investing in lower and mid-market industrial companies in SouthEast Europe. Previously with PwC and EBRD, in 2001 he co-founded JetFinance International, which became the largest consumer finance lender in the region. Through RSTX Capital, his family office, he has gained experience in telecoms, consumer retail, renewable energy, hospitality etc. Mr. Guri has an Executive MBA from the University of Oxford Said Business School. He and his family support a number of educational institutions and initiatives in Albania, Bulgaria, and Kosovo.

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## Dr. Michinari Hamaguchi

Counselor to the President, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST)
Director General, SCARDA/AMED
Japan



Michinari Hamaguchi earned his PhD in medicine from Nagoya University, and appointed Research Associate at the Nagoya University School of Medicine in 1980. He pursued research at Rockefeller University in the U.S. from 1985-1988. From 2009–2015, he served as the President of Nagoya University. After serving as the President of JST from 2015–2022, he has been serving as the Counselor to the President of JST, the Director General of SCARDA to promote vaccine R&D since Apr. 2022 and a Chairperson of the Council for Science and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan (2015-2023).

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## Riko Hojo

Chief of the Strategic International Collaborative Research Program,
Department of International Affairs, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST)
Japan



Riko HOJO is Chief of the Strategic International Collaborative Research Program in the Department of International Affairs at Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST). Since 2025, she has supported bilateral international collaborative research programs that advance science, technology and innovation in strategically important fields aligned with government policy priorities, and contributed to the promotion of science diplomacy. She also supports international rapid-response research cooperation initiatives addressing urgent global challenges and emergencies. She studied education and was an exchange student at Heidelberg University in Germany from 2019 to 2020. After joining JST in 2022, she participated in a short-term training program hosted by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 2025, focusing on professional exchange and network building among research funding organizations.

## Chad Holliday



Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
Chief Advisor, Resource Resolutions
USA

Charles O. (Chad) Holliday, Jr. is the Former Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell plc. He previously served as Chairman of the board of Bank of America and as Chairman and CEO of DuPont, the company he retired from after 36 years of service.
Chad is Lead Independent Non-Executive director at Venterra Group plc and lead investor at Resource Resolutions, plc. He is a licensed Professional Engineer and a member of the U.S. National Academy of Engineering and the UK Royal Society of Engineering.
He is also a founding member of the International Business Council and a Senior Fellow of The Mission Possible Partnership (MPP), an alliance of climate leaders focused on supercharging efforts to decarbonize some of the world's highest emitting industries in the next 10 years. MPP is a joint venture between multiple NGOs including the World Economic Forum to expand and accelerate the work of seven nascent industry working groups in aluminium, aviation, cement and concrete, chemicals, shipping, steel and trucking.
He previously served as Chairman of the following organizations: U.S. Council on Competitiveness, United Nations Sustainable Energy for All, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Catalyst, U.S. Business Council and the U.S. National Academy of Engineering. Holliday graduated from the University of Tennessee with a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering. He received honorary doctorates from Polytechnic University, Brooklyn, New York; Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland; and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

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## Bettany Hughes OBE FSA FHA



Author, Historian and Broadcaster
Co-founder and Creative Director, Sandstone Global Productions
United Kingdom

Bettany Hughes is a multi award-winning historian, author and broadcaster, who has devoted the last 30 years to the vibrant and inclusive communication of the past, and its place in modern lives. She has written and presented over 100 TV and radio documentaries for broadcasters and streamers including the BBC, Channel 4, Netflix, Discovery, The History Channel, National Geographic, Amazon Prime and ITV. Bettany has been honoured with numerous awards including the Medlicott Medal for services to history, Europe's Cultural Heritage Prize and an OBE for services to history. Her latest book 'The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World' was an instant Sunday Times bestseller, is being translated into 10 languages and has been adapted for international television. Bettany is a contributing editor of Wanderlust travel and adventure magazine, and founder and Creative Director of the award-winning content production company Sandstone Global. Bettany has a social media following of 300k and her content reaches 2.3 billion every year.

## The Hon. Jerry Hultin



Distinguished Fellow, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)
USA

Jerry promotes the role of technology, entrepreneurship and innovation for economic growth and quality of life around the world. He is an author, speaker and advisor on innovation, urban technology, affordable housing, the future of automation and work, and national security. His global work includes New York City, Shanghai, Sydney, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Almaty, Moscow, Tel Aviv, Barcelona, Porte Alegre, Bogota and Mexico City.
Jerry is the CEO and leader of the Global Futures Group, a firm that supports the use of 21st-century technology to create smarter cities and to improve the quality of life of urban citizens throughout the world. He founded the Ohio Housing Innovation Partnership; is past chair of the New York Academy of Sciences, one of America's oldest scientific organizations; serves as chair of Educational Housing Services, a non-profit provider of affordable student housing in NYC; and co-founder of Smart Cities NY, America's first major urban technology conference.
As a university leader, Jerry was an advocate and architect for programs that increased innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities for his students. Starting in 2005, he was the President of Polytechnic University and led its merger with New York University and co-created its Center for Urban Science and Progress. From 2000 to 2005, he was dean of the school of technology management at Stevens Institute of Technology, where he led a major "wargame" on the risk and protection of the ports of New York and New Jersey after the 9/11 attacks.
Jerry served as the Under Secretary of the Navy for President Bill Clinton from 1997 to 2000, where he spearheaded Vice President Al Gore's programs in business innovation. In 2015, he was appointed to the Defense Business Board during the Obama Administration. In 2017, President Obama appointed Jerry as a Commissioner of the ABMC to maintain memorials around the world which honor American soldiers and sailors who died in WWI and WWII.
Jerry is a graduate of Yale Law School, Harvard's new president program, and Ohio State University.

## Prof. Takashi Inutsuka, MEng



Executive Director, Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI)
Specially Appointed Professor, University of Tsukuba
Japan

Professor Takashi Inutsuka currently serves in multiple senior leadership roles at the intersection of science, technology, and innovation. Based in Tsukuba—Japan's largest science city—he plays a leading role in advancing innovation through his positions as Executive Director of the Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI) and Specially Appointed Professor at the University of Tsukuba.
In these roles, he leads cross-sector frameworks that bring together government, academia, research organizations, and industry to accelerate the practical implementation of medical device technologies and other deep-tech innovations. He also oversees the formation of

industry–academia collaboration hubs and directs the planning and management of new initiatives and emerging industries.
In addition, he is Chief Executive Officer of Tsukuba Twin Spark, Inc., a wholly owned university spin-out established in 2022 to bridge academic research with societal needs through commercialization support. In parallel, he serves as Managing Partner of Nocturne Capital Co., Ltd., a seed-stage venture capital firm fostering startups and entrepreneurial talent in the Tsukuba region.
His career began in public service at the former Science and Technology Agency (STA), where he contributed to Japan's space programs, including the H-IIA rocket and HTV transfer vehicle. He later held senior posts at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Cabinet Office, where he shaped policies in nuclear energy, fusion, and science diplomacy. From 2009 to 2012, he served as Science Counselor at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C., strengthening bilateral cooperation with the United States. He subsequently directed international cooperation at MEXT as well as regenerative medicine strategy at the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST).
Throughout his career, he has consistently advanced global collaboration in health technologies, science, and innovation, with a strong commitment to leveraging research, industry–academia partnerships, and entrepreneurship for economic growth.

## Erion Isufi

CEO & Founder, Landmark Communications
Albania



Erion Isufi was born in Tirana, the capital of Albania, on March 21, 1978. He grew up and received his education in Tirana, later pursuing higher studies at the University of Utrecht, where he earned a Master's Degree in Arts in 2004, focusing on History and International Relations.
After completing his studies in the Netherlands, Erion returned to Albania to contribute to its economic growth. With an entrepreneurial spirit, he launched various ventures in retail, communications, and technology.
Through his communications agency, Landmark Communications, Erion has led a team of creative professionals, developing comprehensive marketing campaigns for corporate clients. His work includes significant rebranding eTorts for ONE Telecom (after the acquisition from T-Mobile), which later merged with Albtelecom, and providing full-service support to Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the first foreign direct investment in Albania after the fall of communism in 1993. He has had the opportunity to direct projects for many international companies operating in Albania.
In the past decade, Erion has continued his entrepreneurial journey by establishing several technology companies, notably Moveo Albania Technology and Landmark Technologies. Recognizing Albania's strategic location as a gateway to Eastern Europe and the strong technical and language skills of its workforce, he created a company to serve foreign clients in software development, testing, and communications. Committed to attracting valuable job opportunities for Albanian youth, Erion facilitated the entry of the Italian giant Sisal into Albania, which now employs over 750 people and conducts much of its internal software development in the country.

For his constant eTorts to growth in the IT field, Landmark Technologies was recognized by Deloitte Central Eastern Europe in 2022 as one of the fastest growing technology companies in all of Eastern Europe[1]. It was and still is the first ever Albanian company to be awarded such a prestigious price. He has joined GCC with the goal of enhancing Albania's competitiveness on the global stage and attracting high-value jobs to help retain young talent and combat brain drain.

## Professor Ir. Dr. Lau Kok Keong



Director of the Institute of Regenerative Futures, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP)
Malaysia

Ir Dr Lau Kok Keong, is currently holding the position of Professor at Chemical Engineering Department and Head for Centre of Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, UTP. He has joined UTP since 2007. He is a Chartered Marine Engineer (UK) and Professional Engineer in Malaysia. His expertise covers the Carbon Capture & Utilization include membrane separation, absorption, simulation and process scale-up.
Dr Lau has published more than 130 high-impact journals and have been participating in various consultancy and research projects with the total value > USD 5 millions. He also actively collaborates with various research institutions and companies from different countries include Thailand, Netherland, Denmark, UK, etc. In term of innovation, he has filed more than 10 patents/ copyrights and commercialized 1 software product.

## Nkem Khumbah



Director, STI Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, African Academy of Science
Kenya

Dr. Nkem Khumbah joined the African Academy of Science as Head of STI Policy Systems, Governance and Partnerships (STI-PGA), effective September 2023. He is also a Senior Fellow with the Washington-based Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (theGFCC.org), faculty affiliate with the Science, Technology and Public Policy Program (STPP) at the University of Michigan, and Chairman of the Africa Development Futures Group. He previously was Lecturer of Mathematics and member of the STEM-Africa Initiative at the University of Michigan; Assistant Professor of Mathematics at North Georgia College and State University; and held research Fellows at Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at UCLA and the Mathematical Science Research Institute at UC Berkeley. He has worked extensively with the breath of African Science, Technology and Higher Education bodies, including serving in 2015 as Founding Executive Curator of the Next Einstein Forum (NEF): Africa's Global Forum for Science, Policy and Society. His articles have appeared in journals like the New York Times and the African Policy Review; he is frequent speaker at conferences and symposia in North America, Africa, Asia, and South America.

## Dr Paul Madden CEng CITP

Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Competitiveness
United Kingdom



Paul is experienced in promoting and managing advanced technology projects in various industrial sectors on a regional, national and international basis. He has strong inter-personal skills forged over many years of working in customer-driven industries in international business environments. He has proven ability to collaborate with colleagues from differing backgrounds, cultures and disciplines to achieve commercial success. He is an experienced Non-Executive Director in the public and private sectors.
Paul was General Manager of Rolls-Royce Aerospace in Northern Ireland from 1998 - 2015; he implemented a major investment plan to establish a technology centre of excellence with 50+ employees developing safety-critical software for the company's suite of civil and military aircraft engines. He designed and implemented a corporate strategy for software engineering process improvement based upon the University of Pittsburgh's CMMI framework. He collaborated with regional and national government bodies to implement industry growth initiatives via his role as Chairman of the Northern Ireland Aerospace Consortium (cluster-representative body) for 7 years. Prior to his time with Rolls-Royce, Paul worked in the IT industry; he directed a programme for software quality awareness and training in Central and Eastern Europe and supported the European Commission in defining the content of technology research and development programmes. In his role as CEO of the Centre for Competitiveness, Paul is leading the Centre's initiatives in renewable energy focusing on the utilisation of agricultural manures for the production of biomethane, exploitation of geothermal energy for heating public sector buildings and digitalisation and decarbonisation of the electricity grid through the Centre's Smart Grid Ireland network. Paul holds a PhD in Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics from Queen's University Belfast and in 2024 he was granted the GFCC's Global Competitiveness Award in recognition of Leadership in Advancing the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland.

## Kalin Marinov

Head of the International Relations and Strategic Development Department,
Glavbolgarstroy (GBS)
Bulgaria



Kalin Marinov is heading the International Affairs and Strategic Development Department of Glavbolgastroy (GBS) and leading the team on ESG reporting and compliance of the corporate group. Under his direct responsibilities are the management of the GBS representative offices in Brussels, Vienna and Washington DC, ensuring proactive membership in international organizations and networks as well as coordination of EU-funded R&D projects for development and introduction of innovations in the areas in which the corporate group is operating.
Before joining GBS Kalin Marinov took several leading positions at the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Innovation and Growth of the Republic of Bulgaria working on the implementation of policies and financial incentives for the enhancement of the competitiveness of the Bulgarian businesses. In particular, deployment of grant financing, equity and loan mechanisms.

Member of the Supervisory Board of the Fund Manager of Financial Instruments in Bulgaria, a specially created public intervention tool owned by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria. For a period of 3 years is Senior Advisor at the state-owned Norwegian agency Innovation Norway on its operations in the region of Southeastern Europe.

## Prof. Miguel Athayde Marques



Vice-Rector for Infrastructural and Strategic Development, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Professor of Management, Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics
Portugal

Miguel Athayde Marques is Vice-Rector for Infrastructural and Strategic Development at Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Professor of Business at Católica-Lisbon School of Business & Economics. As part of his academic duties, he taught at CEIBS — China Europe International Business School (Beijing, Shanghai) and other business schools, in MBA Programs. In business, he currently serves as Vice-Chairman of the Board of Galp Energia (oil & gas) and as independent board director of Brisa-CR (concessionaire of tolled highways). He is also a member of the Monitoring Committee of Novo Banco. Formerly, Miguel Athayde Marques was Chairman and CEO of the Portuguese Stock Exchange (Euronext Lisbon), and a member of the management committee of NYSE Euronext (New York Stock Exchange), and Euronext N.V. (Holland). Before that, he was executive board member of Caixa Geral de Depósitos (banking), and of Jerónimo Martins (international retail and distribution). He was also President of AICEP — the Portuguese Agency for Trade and Investment.

## Ivan Mihaylov



Chief Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria
Bulgaria

Ivan Mihaylov is seasoned executive with over 15 years of experience in IT, telecommunications, and automotive businesses. As of October 2022, Ivan was appointed as AmCham CEO and prior to that he is AmCham Board Member (2020-2022). He held a position of Country lead of Intellias Bulgaria – Ukrainian based software company. Before that he held a position of Country Manager – Bulgaria and Romania of Visteon Electronics (2014 – 2022) and Operations Manager of Johnson Controls Electronics Bulgaria (2012 – 2014) – both leading automotive US based companies in Detroit Michigan. His early career also includes IT management roles in telecommunication company GLOBUL (today known as Yettel) and before that Sofiyska voda (part of United Utilities, UK). Ivan was Chairman of the Board of Automotive Cluster Bulgaria (2015 to 2023), also Chairman of the Board of the Bulgarian Employers Organization Innovative Technologies (BRAIT) - 2020 – 2023. Ivan has triple MSc – one from the Technical University of Sofia in Computer Science, and one from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Economy, and one from The Red McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin, USA.

## Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe



Deputy Director-General for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships,
Department of Science, Technology & Innovation
South Africa

Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe is the Deputy Director-General (DDG) for Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships at the Department of Science and Innovation in South Africa. Dr Muofhe previously held the position of Deputy Director-General for International Resources and Cooperation and Deputy Director-General for Technology Innovation in the same Department.
Dr. Muofhe holds a PhD in Management of Technology and Innovation, Master of Business Administration and Master of Science
He has years of experience in the South African Science, Technology and Innovation System and the global innovation systems in general, which includes doing scientific research, managing research, international cooperation, development and implementation of innovation funding schemes and implementation of various innovation initiatives and instruments.
Dr Muofhe led the implementation of various science, technology and innovation strategies such as the National Space Science Strategy, Bioeconomy, and Hydrogen South Africa (Energy). He currently leads the implementation of the Circular and Digital Economy (the new sources of growth) aspects of the White Paper for Science, Technology and Innovation; the Modernisation of critical sectors of the South African Economy such as Mining, Agriculture and Manufacturing and the mainstreaming of Science, Technology and Innovation in government through innovation sensitive planning and budget coordination.
He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the World Health Organisation's mRNA Technology Transfer Hub which is entrusted with building vaccine manufacturing capabilities in low- and middle-income countries. Dr Muofhe is also the South African Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Principal, a member of its Executive Committee and one of its four Co-chairs.

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## Plamena Nenkova



Deputy Executive Director International Affairs & Sustainable Development,
Glavbolgarstroy (GBS)
Bulgaria

Plamena Nenkova is the Deputy Executive Director of GBS in charge of "International Affairs & Sustainable Development".
Her expertise includes engagement in all phases of EU and other donor funding programmes, i.e.: drafting and submission of applications, contract's signature, contract management and reporting. Nenkova possesses sufficient experience in the field of international affairs and business development, being responsible for: the GBS membership and active participation in international/ EU sectoral and industry associations maintenance of contacts with international partners foreign business negotiations, etc. She is also heading the company EU Liaison Office in Brussels, as well as the GBS Representative Offices in Washington D.C. and Vienna.
Prior to joining GBS in 2019, Ms. Nenkova had 10 years of professional experience in the gas energy sector and 7 years in the non-governmental sector.

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Plamena Nenkova holds a Master's degree in European Studies from Westminster University in London and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University for National and World Economy in Sofia, Bulgaria. She is also currently pursuing an Energy MBA at Texas Christian University in the United States.

## Kalin Peshov

Chairman of the Management Board, Glavbolgarstroy (GBS)
Bulgaria



Beginning his career at a FMCG market company, Kalin Peshov subsequently ventured to Honeywell, and, after completing his Master's degree in Business Administration, joined the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria. In 2002, he accepted the role of Head of Marketing Division at GBS, eventually ascending to Executive Director of "Glavbolgarstroy Holding" (2005), Chief Executive Officer (2011), Member of the Management Board (2005 – 2019) and Member of the Supervisory Board (2019 – 2023). Since 2017, he has held the positions of Chairman of the Board of Directors of "Glavbolgarstroy International" and since 2023 - Chairman of the Management Board of "Glavbolgarstroy Holding". As of 2018, Kalin Peshov serves as Vice-President of the Bulgarian Construction Chamber (BCC). Additionally, he is a member of the Advisory Board of the Ralph Lowe Energy Institute/Texas Christian University (TCU) and a Member of the Board of the Vienna Economic Forum. Peshov holds a Master's degree in Electrical Science from the Technical University of Sofia, a Master's degree in Business Administration from the Business School of Lausanne, and an Executive Master's in Public Administration from the Wharton, University of Pennsylvania (USA).

## Dr. Bernadett Petri

Managing Director, Hungarian Development Promotion Office
Hungary



Bernadett Petri is Managing Director of the Hungarian Development Promotion Office (MFOI). She has nearly two decades of experience in European policy, innovation, competitiveness and regional development, including more than a decade working with and within EU institutions.
At MFOI, she leads Hungary's efforts to strengthen participation in directly managed EU programmes and to connect companies, universities, municipalities and other organisations with European innovation and funding opportunities. Her work focuses particularly on closing Europe's innovation and competitiveness gaps, strengthening Central and Eastern Europe's role in European innovation ecosystems, and improving the translation of research and public funding into economic impact. Previously, she served as Ministerial Commissioner for the coordination of directly managed EU funds and held policy positions in the European Parliament and the European Commission. She is also a researcher and regularly contributes to international discussions on EU competitiveness, innovation policy, regional ecosystems and the future of European funding.

## Borislav Petrov



Executive Director, Institute for Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Technology (INSAIT)
Bulgaria

Borislav Petrov has been the Executive Director of INSAIT since December 2021. He has been engaged with the operational work of the institute since February 2021.
Borislav was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1984, and graduated from the mathematics high school in his hometown Blagoevgrad. He received his B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering and M.Sc. in Information Technology from Mannheim University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Borislav Petrov worked in various R&D teams of leading technology companies and organizations such as Siemens, BASF, FZI, and Sirona Dental Systems. Looking for new opportunities, Petrov moved to Zurich where he worked for Thoratec and Siemens Mobility AG developing a successful career. After spending 14 years abroad, he moved back to Bulgaria and co-founded a successful engineering company in the field of embedded systems and IoT. For many years Borislav was actively involved in the formation and governance of several NGOs.

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## H.E. Iva Petrova



Minister of Energy
Republic of Bulgaria

Iva Petrova has extensive professional experience in the energy sector, with a background in both public administration and the corporate environment. She began her professional career in 2000 at the Ministry of Energy, where she advanced to the position of Director of "Energy Markets and Restructuring" in 2008. Subsequently, from February 2009 until the end of June 2010, she served as Director of "Projects and Investments" at the Bulgarian Energy Holding. Ms. Petrova has also worked in the private sector as a partner in a management consulting company advising energy and utility companies in the region. Since September 2021, she has served as Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Energy, responsible for markets, strategy, reforms, and investments under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan in the areas of integration and utilization of renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, infrastructure, and market liberalization. As Deputy Minister, she oversaw the participation in the decision-making process at EU level and chaired Working Group 14 "Energy." Since 2000, Ms. Petrova has been a part-time Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, where she currently teaches courses on the management and marketing of energy and utility companies within Master's degree programs. Holds a Master's degree in Economics and Management from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. She has also completed a postgraduate qualification program at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. In addition, she has completed specialization programs in Hungary, Japan, and Belgium. Fluent in English and speaks Italian.

## H.E. Alexander Pulev

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, Investments and Industry
Republic of Bulgaria



Alexander Pulev was born on February 5, 1981, in Plovdiv. He holds a Master's degree in Finance from the University of Oxford and a Bachelor's degree in Information Systems and Finance from the University of Maine, USA.
His professional career includes positions at UniCredit, where he served for four years as Director of Investment Banking; the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), where he worked for six years as a Principal Banker; and as Manager of Deal Advisory at Ernst & Young. He has also worked in international companies such as Citigroup Global Markets, Brown Brothers Harriman, and General Electric.
Alexander Pulev has extensive experience in project finance and in structuring transactions ranging from equity investments to the syndication of hybrid and senior debt. He managed the portfolio of start-up companies at Bulbank and served as coordinator of the EBRD's venture capital program for the Balkans.
In public administration, he has held key positions, including Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications (2021) and Minister of Innovation and Growth in two consecutive caretaker governments (2022–2023), where he worked to support businesses and attract investment.

## Boyan Rashev

Founder, Mind Your Future
Bulgaria



Boyan Rashev is a leading Bulgarian sustainability expert, independent analyst, and commodity investor specializing in the intersection of environmental policy, energy economics, and industrial competitiveness. He is the founder of MindYourFuture.org, an analytical platform dedicated to promoting a pragmatic, evidence-based approach to natural resource management and regional economic growth.
A pioneer of sustainability consulting in Eastern Europe, Mr. Rashev co-founded denkstatt Bulgaria in 2007, building it into the nation's preeminent ESG, circular economy, and decarbonization advisory firm prior to its corporate integration into EY. Throughout his two decades of practice, he has advised major multinational enterprises spanning the mining, energy, and financial sectors, as well as institutional bodies like the European Commission. Renowned for bringing rational realism and data-driven critique to public policy, he frequently addresses international leadership forums on the realities of the green transition. He also serves as the principal strategic consultant to the Expat Natural Resources fund, mapping investment trends in critical raw materials and industrial metals.

## Kiril Ravnachki

Executive Director, Bulgartransgaz EAD
Bulgaria



Kiril Ravnachki has been elected as CEO of the Bulgarian gas transmission system operator Bulgartransgaz in August 2026. He is Member of the Management Board since February 2023 and has been CEO of the company also in the period from April 2024 to January 2025. Over the period from 2019 until the beginning of 2023, Mr. Ravnachki was the Executive Director of Balkan Gas Hub EAD – the operator of the Bulgarian gas exchange. In the period April-December 2024 he has been a Member of the Board of the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSOG). Mr. Ravnachki was the Bulgarian representative in the ad-hoc Steering Board of the AggregateEU platform for the purchase of natural gas, created at the end of 2022 by the European Commission. Mr. Ravnachki holds double majors in Economics and Business Administration from the American University in Bulgaria.

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## Leslie Rowlands

Managing Partner, Gallup Inc.
United Kingdom



Leslie Rowlands is a senior advisor and trusted partner to leading global organizations, with over 25 years' experience at Gallup.
He partners with C-suite leaders to transform employee and customer engagement, helping clients achieve recognition as Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award winners. Leslie is a certified Gallup Strengths Coach and holds degrees from Reims Management School and Middlesex Business School, London. Prior to Gallup, he built his career in high tech in both B2B and B2C markets.
Away from the office, Leslie is a keen racket sports player and has represented his adopted county of Norfolk at pickleball.

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## Jennifer Steel

Associate Vice President for Government Affairs, American University of Beirut
Lebanon



Jennifer Steel has served as the Associate Vice President for Government Affairs at the American University of Beirut since 2016. Based in Washington, D.C., she is the primary liaison between the university and various governmental bodies, including the U.S. Congress, the US Department of State and the European Union. Her background includes high-level experience on Capitol Hill—notably serving as Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Director for members of the

U.S. House of Representatives, where she handled committee work for the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, the Middle East Foreign Affairs Subcommittee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. She was recognized in 2023 by the Middle East Policy Council as a "40 under 40" awardee, and in 2010 by Foreign Policy Magazine as a "Hill Staffer to Watch" for her contributions to Middle East policy and international relations. She has also named a Truman National Security Project Congressional Scholar, a Partnership for a Secure America Congressional Fellow, and as a Freeman ASIA Foundation Fellow. Earlier in her career, she worked at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, EARTH University in Costa Rica, and the Chemical Weapons Working Group. She holds an M.A. from the U.S. Naval War College and two B.A.s from Berea College. She has done graduate work at the U.S. National Defense University and Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

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## Ruslan Stefanov



General Manager, ARC Consulting EOOD
Applied Research and Communications Fund
Bulgaria

Ruslan Stefanov serves as the Director of Strategy and Innovation at the Applied Research and Communications Fund and as the General Manager of its consulting arm, ARC Consulting EOOD, which manages the Enterprise Europe Network node in Bulgaria. He brings over 15 years of experience in research and consulting across South East Europe and the Black Sea region, specializing in smart specialization policy, regional innovation strategies, technology assessments, and SME promotion.
In addition to his management roles, Ruslan co-chairs Innovation.bg, the leading annual evaluation of Bulgaria's innovation performance, and serves as a jury member for the National Innovation Award. His research focus centers on energy governance, energy security, innovation policy, and industrial transition, with further interest in constructive capital and regional economic strategies.
He holds a Master's degree in Economics and Business Administration from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia and is fluent in English, German, and Russian.

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## Preslav Tonkov



Senior Advisor, Global Analytics, Gallup Inc.
UK

Preslav Tonkov is a strategic adviser to global organizations dedicated to quantifying and improving human development issues worldwide. As a Senior Advisor on Gallup's Global Analytics team, he manages a research portfolio that bridges evidence gaps for decision-makers at global NGOs, research universities and various UN agencies. Preslav holds a BSc in International Relations and an MSc in Social Research from the London

School of Economics, supplemented by a year of study at the University of California, Berkeley. He specializes in translating complex data into actionable insights, drawing on extensive experience at international policy forums—including the UN World Data Forum and the World Health Summit—to address the world's most critical developmental challenges.

## Symeon G. Tsomokos

President, Delphi Economic Forum
Greece



Symeon G. Tsomokos is the Founder and President of the Delphi Economic Forum, an independent and impartial non-profit organization committed to deliver and promote innovative ideas for sustainable and competitive growth for Southeast Europe and the East Mediterranean.
He established SGT S.A in Athens in 1997, and TGI in Belgrade in 2001.
He is also the Founder of the Business Council for Greece-United States, the Greek-Hungarian Business Council, the Greek-Egyptian Business Council, while in 2006 he established the Greece-Serbia Chamber of Commerce.
In the past he has served as Commercial Specialist at the US Embassy in Athens (1973-1980) and CEO at the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce (1980-1997).
He has also served as Secretary General & Treasurer of the Council of the American Chambers of Commerce based in Europe (1990-1993) and as Secretary General of the Business Council Greece-Turkey (1993-1998).
In 1993, he was an Eisenhower Exchange Fellow.
A graduate of the Athens University of Economics and Business and a graduate of the Varvakeio High School.

## Dimitar Tsotsorkov

Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Asarel-Medet JSC
Bulgaria



Dimitar Tsotsorkov is Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Asarel-Medet JSC, Bulgaria's leading copper mining and processing company, and Chief Executive Officer of Asarel Investment JSC, the group's strategic investment company responsible for developing and managing a diversified portfolio beyond the mining sector.
Dimitar holds dual bachelor's degrees in Economics and Computing Economics from Richmond University in London and a Master's degree in Information Management and Finance from the University of Westminster. He has completed executive education at IMD Lausanne, as well as numerous additional professional and academic specialization programs. He is fluent in English, Russian, and German. Dimitar has extensive experience in mining, investment, and international trade. He leads all of Asarel-Medet's newly launched mining projects in Bulgaria, the largest of which involves

investments exceeding EUR 60 million and the direct and indirect engagement of more than 2,400 professionals. He manages the company's investment portfolio across sectors including tourism, healthcare, logistics, high technology, and others, as well as Asarel's annual competition for innovative projects.
As a founder and member of the Management Board of the Lachezar Tsotsorkov Foundation, Dimitar strongly believes in the principles of philanthropy and is actively committed to its revival in Bulgaria.

## Prof. Götz Veser



Professor & Director of the Covestro Circular Economy Program, University of Pittsburgh
USA

Götz Veser is the Nickolas DeCecco Professor of Chemical Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh's Swanson School of Engineering and Director of the Covestro Circular Economy Program at the Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation. His research focuses on the development of intensified, low-carbon routes to fuels, hydrogen, and critical materials, and the application of artificial intelligence to shorten the discovery cycle for new catalysts and processes. He co-founded and serves as Chief Technology Officer of Graphonos Materials Inc., a start-up spun out of his laboratory producing battery-grade graphite and low-carbon hydrogen from natural gas. Trained at the University of Karlsruhe and at the Fritz-Haber-Institute of the Max-Planck-Society in Berlin, Veser held positions at the University of Stuttgart and the Max-Planck-Institute for Coal Research in Germany before joining Pitt in 2002. He has led more than $20 million in research programs, including multi-year industrial collaborations with Shell, Covestro, Braskem, and Lubrizol, and has supervised over 50 doctoral researchers now working across the global energy, chemicals, and materials industries. Veser is a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and serves on the governing board of RAPID, the U.S. Department of Energy's manufacturing institute for process intensification.

## The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith



Founder & President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC);
President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

The Honorable Deborah L. Wince-Smith is the President & CEO of the Council on Competitiveness, a non-partisan leadership coalition of CEO's, University Presidents, Labor Union Leaders, and National Laboratory Directors, all committed to developing policy solutions and national initiatives to drive future productivity growth, prosperity for all Americans, and the global success of American Businesses.
Ms. Wince-Smith assumed the leadership role of the Council on Competitiveness after a distinguished career as a senior U.S. Government official. She began her career as a program director for the National Science Foundation, where she managed U.S. research programs with Eastern European countries and U.S. universities. She served as the Assistant Director for

International Affairs in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy for the Reagan Administration. She was the first Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy in the U.S. Department of Commerce in the Administration of President George H.W. Bush, overseeing federal technology transfer policy, implementation of the Bayh-Dole Act, and the White House National Technology Initiative. Ms. Wince-Smith was the architect of the landmark 1988 Head of Government Science and Technology Agreement with Japan, and developed ministerial bilateral collaborations with China, India and Latin America. Ms. Wince-Smith developed President Reagan's 1988 Competitiveness Initiative and led the implementation of executive orders and new laws that transformed federal technology transfer policy for U.S. industries, national laboratories and universities. Following her government tenure, Ms. Wince-Smith became active in the governance of various national scientific laboratories and provided strategic counsel to several FORTUNE 100 companies.

An internationally renowned, leading voice and expert on competitiveness policy, innovation strategy, science and technology and international economic policy, Ms. Wince-Smith has recharged the national debate on America's competitiveness future, strategic commitment to global leadership in innovation and economic transformations underway on energy systems, advanced manufacturing and the future of work. Ms. Wince-Smith is frequently called upon to testify in front of the U.S. Congress and appears regularly on global television news networks including Bloomberg, BBC, CNBC, CNN and Fox News.

Ms. Wince-Smith spearheaded the National Innovation Initiative (NII) that played a pivotal role in shaping the 2006 Bipartisan National Competes Act. Ms. Wince-Smith helped catalyze a national "innovation movement" launching regional and state innovation initiatives and stimulating a new global focus on competitiveness strategy and policies to optimize innovation-based growth, the production of high value goods, global experts, and skilled job creation. Ms. Wince-Smith leads the Council's Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Initiatives to accelerate energy innovation and advanced manufacturing as twin pillars of U.S. productivity growth, skilled job creation, and global exports.

Building upon the thought leadership and policy import of the NII, the Council's Energy and Manufacturing Initiative, and Technology Leadership Forum of Chief Technology Officers, Ms. Wince-Smith conceived and initiated the Council's newly launched "National Commission on Innovation and Competitiveness Frontiers." The Commissioners will focus on emerging challenges and opportunities and develop a future oriented policy roadmap to jumpstart flagging productivity, respond to new global competitors and address the impacts of ever accelerating technology driven transformation.

Since 2009, Ms. Wince-Smith has served as President and Founder of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), engaging leaders from over thirty competitiveness organizations from around the globe. The GFCC is the first global network devoted exclusively to the exchange of knowledge and practice related to competitiveness policies and strategies; and, it is the first international, public-private mechanism to promote global economic growth through collaboration in innovation.

Ms. Wince-Smith is a member of corporate and non-profit Boards of Directors, Advisory Committees, and philanthropic organizations. She served as a Senate confirmed member of the Oversight Board of the Internal Revenue Service from 2006 – 2012, serving under the Administrations of President George W. Bush and President Barack H. Obama. She served as Chairman of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Competitiveness, and as a

Public Director of NASDAQ-OMX from 2005 – 2012. She previously served on the Smithsonian National Board, the Secretary of State's Committee on International Economic Policy, the U.S. Naval Academy Foundation and the Board of Governors of Argonne National Laboratory. She also served on the Advisory Committee of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) and UNICEF.

As a long-standing leader in the national laboratory system, Ms. Wince-Smith served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. She previously served on the University of California President's Council overseeing Los Alamos, Lawrence Berkeley and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories. She served two terms of service on the University of Chicago's Board of Governors for Argonne National Laboratory, and as a trustee of Lehigh University. She served as a member of Purdue University's Strategic Research Advisory Council (SRAC) and as a member of Marquette University's External Advisory Board for Corporate Engagement, as a member of the Queen's University International Advisory Committee for the Management School, as a member of UNICEF's Advisory Group, as a member of the Advisory Board of the Delphi Economic Forum, and as an Independent Advisor to Delos Living, LLC. On behalf of former Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, she chaired the Secretary's National Advisory Committee on Strengthening America's Communities producing the first comprehensive assessment of U.S. Government Economic Development Strategy and Program. Ms. Wince-Smith currently serves as a Commissioner on the Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property. She is a member of the Council of Japan's Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum, she serves as a Board of Trustees of the Hevolution Foundation US, and as a member of the Strategic Research Advisory Board of Oklahoma University. She also serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the College Year in Athens, she serves on the Board of Directors of the Mycenaean Foundation, and as a Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of the American College of Greece (ACG). As an expert in technology commercialization, Ms. Wince-Smith serves on the Board of Directors of Aerolase, Inc., and Q-Net Security, Inc. As a member of The Explorers Club, Ms. Wince-Smith is committed to advancing its mission of global exploration, scientific discovery, and protection of the planet.

Ms. Wince-Smith graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Vassar College and earned a master's degree in Classical Archaeology from King's College, Cambridge University. She received an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities from Michigan State University, an Honorary Doctorate of Public Administration from the University of Toledo, an Honorary Doctorate of Law honoris causa from the Queens University Belfast, an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters honoris causa from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service from the University of South Carolina, and the European University of Tirana, and, most recently, an honorary doctorate from University of Pittsburgh.

Ms. Wince-Smith resides in McLean, Virginia. Her two sons are graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy.

## Prof. Edward C. Wingenbach

President, The American College of Greece
Greece



Edward Wingenbach's career has spanned three decades and centered on transformative academic leadership at liberal arts institutions committed to innovation and social impact. He became the eighth president of The American College of Greece in 2025.

Wingenbach served from 2019–2025 as president of Hampshire College (Amherst, MA), a pioneering liberal arts institution founded in 1965 in cooperation with Amherst College, Mt. Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts. Under Dr. Wingenbach's leadership, Hampshire College experienced unprecedented growth and renewal. He spearheaded a multi-year strategic plan that drove significant enrollment increases, modernized operations, and launched a groundbreaking academic program focused on addressing the urgent challenges of the 21st century. Notably, applications to Hampshire have doubled since 2020, while total enrollment increased by over 50%. Dr. Wingenbach's innovative approach also revitalized Hampshire College's financial health. He restructured fundraising operations, launching the Change in the Making campaign that has already raised over $52 million in direct operational support, including the three largest gifts since the college's founding. His efforts strengthened alumni engagement, increased the alumni giving rate to 35%, and secured over $13 million in state and federal support. In 2023 Hampshire became one of only 15 U.S. higher education institutions to achieve full carbon neutrality.

At Ripon College (Ripon, WI), where he served as vice president and dean of faculty, acting president, and professor of politics and government from 2015–2019, Wingenbach guided the development of the Catalyst Core Curriculum, a unique approach to liberal arts general education in which every student earns a Concentration in Applied Innovation. He established new academic and career development programs, directed strategic financial planning, strengthened sponsored research, and secured major philanthropic support from national foundations. As acting president in 2019, he managed both presidential and CFO responsibilities, advancing institutional strategy while overseeing Ripon's $26 million operating budget.

Earlier in his career, Wingenbach spent fifteen years at the University of Redlands (CA) in administrative and faculty leadership roles, including associate provost, president of the Faculty Assembly, chair of the Department of Government, and director of the International Relations program. He expanded internationalization, enhanced community-based learning, improved sponsored research, oversaw significant graduate program development, and lead university efforts in accreditation and assessment. Students recognized his teaching and mentorship by selecting him as commencement speaker, and the University honored him with its award for distinguished service.

A scholar of democratic theory and political philosophy, Wingenbach has published widely, including the book Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy (Routledge) and articles in leading journals such as The American Journal of Political Science, International Philosophical Quarterly, and The Journal of Politics (where his work was named the best article published in 2001). His teaching and scholarship are deeply informed by Greek thought, and he has held a fellowship at the Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies.

Wingenbach received his bachelor's degree from Lake Forest College, designing his own program of study in an experiential liberal arts model. He earned both his master's and PhD in government and international studies from the University of Notre Dame.
Together with his spouse, Susan Rice, and their son, he resides in Athens, embracing ACG's mission of advancing education that fosters individual potential and contributes to Greece's cultural and economic vitality.

## Mira Yosifova

Deputy Minister of Innovation and Digital Transformation,
Bulgaria



Yosifova is an established expert with nearly 20 years of professional experience in public administration, with a consistent career in the field of strategic planning, management of European programs and development of public policies. Since May 2023, he has been Director of the Policy and Analysis Directorate at the Ministry of Innovation and Growth, where he leads the processes of building and implementing the national innovation policy and tools to support business and technological development. Her professional path includes leadership and expert positions at the Employment Agency, the Center for Human Resources Development, and the Ministry of Culture, where she actively participates in the programming and coordination of key national and European policies.

# Annex

## Cultural Landmarks in Plovdiv

Plovdiv is famous as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It is known for its well-preserved Ancient Theatre of Philippopolis and its Old Town, featuring 19th-century Revival-era architecture. The city's main landmarks are located in the city center.

## Getting Around

All of the sites and restaurants listed below are within easy walking distance of the DoubleTree by Hilton Plovdiv Center — most are 5 to 12 minutes on foot. A map with all locations marked is available by using the QR code below or this link:
GIS 2026 - Plovdiv Guide

> **A FEW NOTES FOR GETTING AROUND COMFORTABLY:**
>
> Much of the Old Town sits on a hill, and the streets around the Ancient Theatre, Nebet Tepe, and the Revival-era houses are cobblestoned and slope upward, so comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Kapana, the Roman Stadium, the Dzhumaya Mosque, and the restaurants below sit on flat, pedestrian-only streets and are an easier walk.

## Old Town

The Architectural-Historical Reserve "Ancient Plovdiv" is a unique open-air museum located on three of the city's hills. Situated in the center of Plovdiv, the reserve is closed to car traffic, making it ideal for a leisurely walk along its charming cobblestone streets. Its main attractions include:

- **Ancient Theatre** – One of the best-preserved Roman theatres in the world, where concerts and other performances are still held today.

- **Revival-Era Houses** – Beautifully preserved, colorful houses such as the Kuyumdzhioglu House (now the Regional Ethnographic Museum), Balabanov House, and Hindliyan House.
- **Nebet Tepe** – An ancient Thracian settlement and fortress offering panoramic views of the city.
- **Churches** – The Churches of St. Constantine and Helena, and St. Marina.
- **Kapana** – Historically a traditional crafts district, Kapana is today a lively area filled with galleries, studios, bars, restaurants, and small independent shops. It is a popular destination for locals and visitors alike, vividly reflecting the dynamic spirit of modern-day Plovdiv.
- **Main Street and the Roman Stadium** – The Stadium of Philippopolis, built in the 2nd century AD during the Roman imperial period, is among the largest and best-preserved structures from the Roman Empire on the Balkan Peninsula.
- **Dzhumaya Mosque** – One of the oldest Ottoman religious buildings in the Balkans, located on Plovdiv's main street near the Roman Stadium — a striking reflection of the city's multilayered cultural and historical identity.

## Culinary Experience

### Aylyakria Restaurant

tripadvisor.com - Aylyakria

A gastro bar in Plovdiv's Kapana Creative District, focused on modern interpretations of Bulgarian cuisine using local ingredients.

### Pavazh Restaurant

tripadvisor.com - Pavazh

A well-known restaurant in Plovdiv's Kapana Creative District, recognized for contemporary interpretations of Bulgarian and Eastern European cuisine.

### Hebros Restaurant

tripadvisor.com - Hebros

Bulgarian Revival-era buildings. One of the city's long-established upscale dining venues, it is known for European and fusion cuisine, an extensive wine program, and a focus on seasonal ingredients.

# About the GFCC

The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) is a network of leaders and organizations committed to enhancing sustainable growth through competitiveness strategies, amplifying and accelerating their evolution and best practices worldwide. The GFCC has pioneered the development of global competitiveness principles and members continue to co-create cross-border thinking and action on the field.

The GFCC is a global organization founded in 2010. Our network spans more than 30 countries across every continent and is composed of two key groups: members who secure their place through yearly dues, and distinguished experts who are invited to join as fellows.

By connecting businesses, civil society organizations, universities, and government agencies, the GFCC enables shared learning and access to world-class expertise for transformation. With a hands-on approach and focus on collaboration, the GFCC helps its members build and deploy strategies.

GFCC
GLOBAL FEDERATION OF COMPETITIVENESS COUNCILS

## Contact & Connect

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# GFCC Board and Team

## BOARD



**Charles O. Holliday Jr.**
Chairman



**Deborah L. Wince-Smith**
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**Isabel Capeloa Gil**
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**Ricardo Alban**
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**Roberto Alvarez**
Executive Director and Secretary to the Board

## TEAM



**Roberto Alvarez**
Executive Director



**Simone Melo**
Communications and Research Manager



**Elaine Rodriguez**
Director of Operations

# GFCC Members

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**Australia**

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**Bulgaria**

Glavbolgarstroy Holding AD

**Canada**

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**Greece**

American College of Greece
Christopher Allen
Council on Competitiveness of Greece—CompeteGR
Delphi Economic Forum
Piraeus Bank

**Hungary**

Bernadett Petri

**Japan**

Japan Science and Technology Agency
Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI)

**Kazakhstan**

Center for Research & Consulting LLC
Kazakhstan Growth Forum

**Lebanon**

American University of Beirut

**Malaysia**

Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT)
Universiti Teknologi Petronas

**New Zealand**

Auckland University of Technology
University of Auckland

**Oman**

National Competitiveness Office

**Portugal**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**Romania**

Bucharest University of Economic Studies

**Saudi Arabia**

Ministry of Investment for Saudi Arabia (MISA)

**UK**

Centre for Competitiveness
Aston University
Harper Adams University
Queen's University Belfast
Resource Resolutions

**Ukraine**

Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman

**USA**

Academy of Art University
Arizona State University
Council on Competitiveness
Gallup, Inc.
Lockheed Martin Corporation
University of Arizona
University of California San Diego
University of Illinois
University of Nebraska
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
University of Notre Dame
University of Pittsburgh
University of South Carolina
University of Vermont
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Vanderbilt University

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National Competitiveness Commission

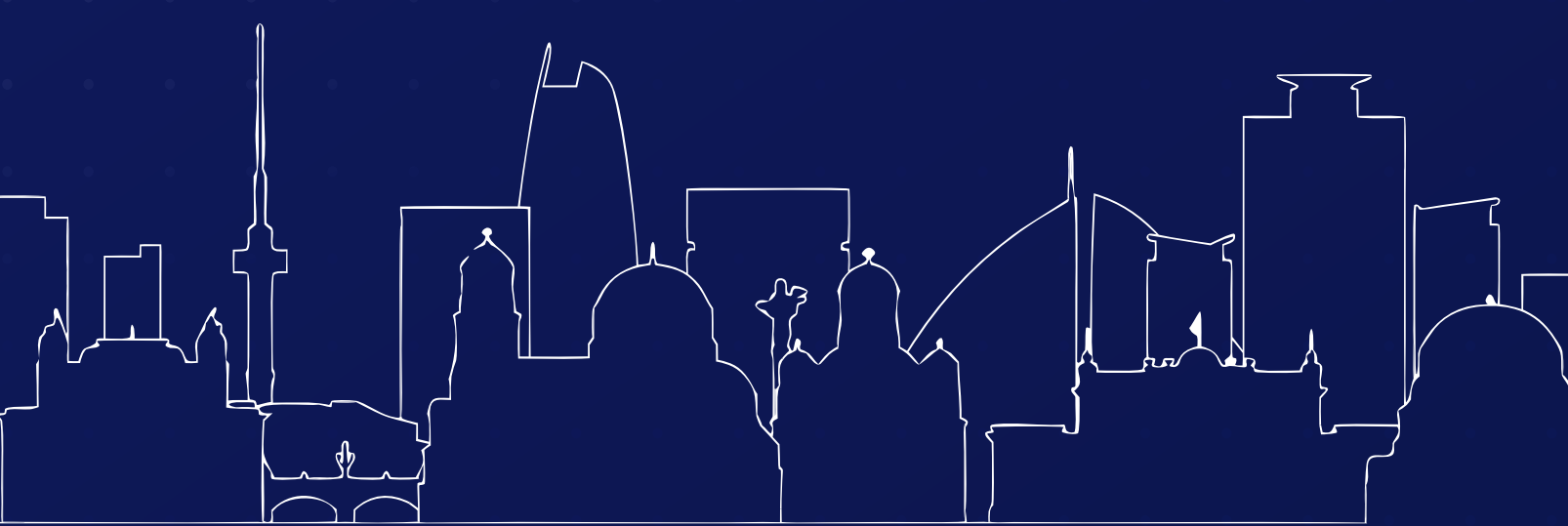
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