

Symposium “Technology for Peace and Democracy in the Age of Global Enlightenment”

On October 25, the Institute of Future and Innovation Studies had the honor to host the symposium “Technology for Peace and Democracy in the Age of Global Enlightenment” at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. The symposium was organized by the Institute in partnership with Boston Global Forum (BGF) and the United Nations Centennial Initiative, with the support of UN Under-Secretary-General, Tech Envoy Amandeep Gill, and within the program of *Festival of Diplomacy*. The symposium was initiated as an effort to create a future vision of technological development and regulation aimed at promoting the use of technology for peace, democracy, and the planet. The symposium was inspired and guided by the [book *Remaking the World – The Age of Global Enlightenment*](#) (2021), published as a joint initiative by BGF and the United Nations Academic Impact as part of the United Nations Centennial Initiative. The book, which includes contributors by distinguished global leaders, seeks to foster discussions to pave the way for a global diplomatic effort to create a more humane, peaceful, and secure world by ethically leveraging the potential of existing and emerging technologies.

Participants in the symposium hosted in Rome in connection with Boston and Tokyo united Europe the United States and Asia for the launch of the initiative.

Opening Remarks

Franco Pavoncello, President of John Cabot University

Francesco Lapenta, Director Institute of Future and Innovation Studies (host and moderator)

Michael Dukakis, Former Democratic Party Nominee for President of the United States

Speakers

Ramu Damodaran, Co-chair of United Nations Centennial Initiative

Zlatko Lagumdžija, former Prime Minister of Bosnia & Herzegovina

Mats Karlsson, former Vice President of World Bank

Yasuhide Nakayama, former Japanese State Minister of Defense

Alex 'Sandy' Pentland, MIT Professor

Zaneta Ozolina, Professor and Chairwoman of LATO and Riga Conference

Roland Schatz, CEO of Media Tenor and Founder and CEO UNGSII Foundation

Allain Cyntryn, Former CTO of Goldman Sachs

Closing remarks

Tuan Nguyen, CEO of Boston Global Forum

The symposium was inaugurated by the President of John Cabot University (JCU), Franco Pavoncello. President Pavoncello stated that the symposium takes place in a crucial time “when we are faced with a dilemma of the relationship between technology and democracy.” While technological means are currently held in the hands of a few, the challenges that these technologies cause are felt on both a global and an individual scale. President Pavoncello explained that the speed of technological progress outruns the speed of social and intellectual progress; “technological transformations have not been accompanied by ideological

renewal – the world is still largely ruled by centuries old ideological schemes.” One of the dilemmas of the contemporary sociotechnical condition is how to redefine what it means to be free and live a decent life in a deeply globalized and digitized world.

President Pavoncello stated that we live in “an age of scientific singularity,” which he defined as an age of “unprecedented planetary opportunities and challenges, where everything is connected, and the very concept of time and distance seems to be eliminated.” “The march towards greater enlightenment,” elaborated President Pavoncello, “lies first and foremost on how younger generations share this endeavor.” The role of education is thus pivotal to global enlightenment. Educators should commit to “provide students with empathy, curiosity, attention to the unfamiliar, and a critical mind.” These qualities are necessary to make younger generations alert to the possibilities of the constantly evolving technological and scientific developments. President Pavoncello stated that we live in “a world of great problems but also, let us be sure, of great promises.” President Pavoncello concluded that just as JCU celebrates its fiftieth anniversary of bridging cultures and nations, this symposium serves as a global bridge of technology for peace.

Professor Francesco Lapenta, the Director of the Institute of Future and Innovation Studies, highlighted that the symposium is an effect of a collaboration between Boston Global Forum and the Institute. The collaboration was started in 2021 in a joint interest and effort to reach a global agreement on AI and sustainability, and since then it expanded to include BGF’s collaboration with the World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid. As Professor Lapenta pointed out, the symposium takes place in the shadow of the Ukraine crisis. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine might make diplomatic global solutions seem futile, Professor Lapenta emphasized that it is precisely in this difficult time when we should be reminded of “the necessity of the pathway of global diplomacy and peace” in the challenges that await us in both present and the future. Professor Lapenta further stated that we should not abandon the will to find a solution through diplomatic ends, as diplomacy should remain the major way to tackle any of the issues and challenges that we will have to deal with on a global and local scale.

To foster dialogue between global actors with a focus on technology requires us to rethink “how can we frame technology as a driver of peace rather than constant competition,” Professor Lapenta explained. Historically, technological innovation was encapsulated within the paradigm of constant competition. This paradigm of innovation as competition became dominant since the Second World War, and directly led to current sustainability and climate crisis. While competition does play an important role in technological innovation and progress, Professor Lapenta pointed out, the paradigm of competition has led to a prevalence of corporate interest, surveillance, political misuse, centralization, rising economic inequality, and a widening social and economic divide.

The history of technological progress is a history of clashes, Professor Lapenta added, and one of such clashes has been between democratic values and technological innovation. “Technology-democracy relation is thus never simple or simple enough,” Professor Lapenta said. However, for democracy to survive, Professor Lapenta emphasized that “we must be able

to develop a future vision that uses technology to address a collective and fair way of approaching social, geopolitical, ecological and economic challenges.” Such future vision can be developed within the condition of the current historical moment, as it, especially now, requires a strong dedication to foster a dialogue of democracy and solidarity to achieve a new global roadmap of technology for peace.

Mats Karlsson, the former Vice President of World Bank, indicated that we currently live in a historically crucial time of decision-making; “there are moments in history when the individual choice matters, and this is one of them.” Referring to “the age of enlightenment,” a term coined by Tuan Nguyen (CEO of BGF), Karlsson said, “I am not sure if we are heading there, but rather in an opposite direction.” However, daily individual choices can bring us a step closer towards global enlightenment. In facing global crises such as climate change and war, the binding constraint is that “we have to choose now, but we have to keep the long-term perspective.” Embracing the long-term perspective as a framework of response applies equally to environmental (climate crisis) and security choices (Ukraine conflict and Russia’s future). If the short-term is the only point of view which one follows – a practice not uncommonly embraced by politicians, Karlsson added – democracy and humanity at large “will simply not survive.”

One way of thinking long-term, explained Karlsson, “is to think not about politics of a singular government but to think of *governance*.” Karlsson proposed five concepts that support such long-term thinking: truth, institution, anti-monopoly, social welfare, and technology for peace. The concept of truth is pivotal because “one can never have peace in the world of lies,” Karlsson said. Truth calls for open-mindedness. University education, an intrinsically long-term endeavor, is not only a privilege; “the youth should bear the responsibility to seek truth.” Institutions, such as EU and UN, are the pillars of governance; “what history teaches us is the evolution of institutions,” Karlsson added. Anti-corruption policies and structures prevent monopoly and are necessary to keep institutions safe and functioning. Social welfare, which Karlsson explained as the welfare state where social policies and public healthcare are sustained, should be safeguarded rather than privatized. Technology for peace has to follow democratic values. Following democratic standards, we need to decide what control mechanisms to put into place over technologies to reconcile the immediacy of knowledge with institutional oversight.

Zlatko Lagumdzija, the former Prime Minister of Bosnia & Herzegovina, underlined the need for unity across nations in Europe. Speaking from Sarajevo, Lagumdzija explained how the conflict in Yugoslavia, “a war over values rather than territory,” was managed in significant part thanks to the United Nations’ unity and support. He expressed hope that the same unity will prevail in the context of the war in Ukraine, and that all European nations will come together to help Ukraine. Lagumdzija elaborated that as he is speaking from Sarajevo, a city of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, he believes that one of the qualities that unites all these people is the value of being Europeans.

European participation in technology of peace, Lagumdzija argued, should be a common endeavor that is not limited by arbitrary borders, such as the European Union or the Schengen area. Similarly, to the European Health Union initiative and the Green

Europe initiative, European countries should come together with an ambition to enlarge these initiatives outside of the EU, Lagumdžija advocated. “The digital transformation of the EU should not stop at the borders of the EU,” he said, adding that Europe should aim to be united across all European countries. Hence, “the point is to see how the EU can step out of the EU borders when thinking of the green transition and the digital transformation, and accordingly prepare for global enlightenment driven by AI and new technologies,” Lagumdžija added. He argued that Europe should become one of the global pillars of digital foundations, alongside Japan, India, and the United States of America. Lagumdžija concluded by saying that “for the cradle of Renaissance, which was the epoch preceding Enlightenment, was in Europe, we should see Europe as once again a single pillar which is commanded by people of similar values, reaching outside of the EU borders, for Europe to be united.”

Alex 'Sandy' Pentland, a MIT Professor, reflected upon the relation between data collection and truth within the discourse on technology for peace. Professor Pentland recalled how, at the beginning of data revolution, he and his team were asked to capture the growing power of data for measuring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By creating a system of data measurement which related to different SDGs, technology was not only allowing to track the variables and progress of SDGs implementation, but also to create strategies and understanding on how to achieve them. The same type of data measurement, Professor Pentland added, can be used to measure social polarization. Research of this type has already been performed, Professor Pentland explained, “especially in the US context, where society is very polarized right now, between Democrats and Republicans.” The research revealed that both sides had a highly distorted view of the other side, yet once they were exposed to the other’s side’s opinions and reasonings, they found more common ground than they had expected. The challenge today is to reconcile the nonlinear relation between data and truth.

“Truth matters,” Professor Pentland stated, and one way of championing truth is by “challenging the distorted view of the other side.” A completely centralized collection and interpretation of data causes unavoidable temptation of tweaking the results once data is collected by one institution, one corporation or one government. For example, the social media are designed in such a way that “they give the false sense that everybody on the other side quite crazy,” Professor Pentland furthered explained. One solution to this distortion is the promise of Web 3.0, which promises to allow one to be in charge of one’s own data. Professor Pentland stated that it is a crucial step towards truth to give “data in hands of people,” a premise which has begun to be implemented in Singapore. Global agreement is needed to create mechanisms of control and transparency of data collection. Professor Pentland concluded that “it is always in the interest of tyrants to lie about the *other* side, yet it is possible to dig holes of truth in tyrants’ backyard of lies.”

Professor Žaneta Ozoliņa, the Chairwoman of the Board of Latvian Transatlantic Organization (LATO), was speaking following her participation in the Rīga Conference, the annual security and foreign policy forum of Latvia. Professor Ozoliņa stated that “digitalization and innovation of technology is often viewed as possible promises rather than possible threats.” In approaching issues of great technological potential, Professor Ozoliņa added, we should account

for the fact that someone with other than democratic values can use it for opposite purposes than building peace and prosperity. The ongoing war in Ukraine put into a sharper light several conceptual concerns which we, as Western societies, have been missing and ignoring. Professor Ozoliņa proposed five shifts of mindset that we should take into consideration while thinking about peace and technology today, ranging from individual to international levels.

First, even a most fundamental human right as the right to live can be threatened, just as it is violated every day in Ukraine, “at our doorstep, right now” Professor Ozoliņa said. Second, democracy tends to be taken for granted, “like taking a sip of water,” which makes us forget that “we have to protect democracy on daily bases.” Third, the Age of Enlightenment initiative of BGF brings into focus the need of global education, “it is our obligation as those who live in peace to provide education globally,” Professor Ozoliņa added. Fourth, international collaboration is crucial, especially in the context of war, we experience a need for global solidarity. Fifth, the relations with problematic neighbors “that we are not comfortable with, such as Russia,” has to be addressed, Professor Ozoliņa said. It is crucial “to see Russian society as more than just one person sitting in Kremlin,” Professor Ozoliņa explained. She added that we should focus on what initiatives and technologies can be used and disseminated to empower and promote at least some elements of democracy within Russian society. Such initiatives require global solidarity and effort, but alongside promotion of education and democratic values, can lead to global enlightenment.

Yasuhide Nakayama, the former Japanese State Minister of Defense, brought attention to the social and cultural contexts in which technology is developed, deployed, and used. Nakayama warned against a technodeterministic approach to technology, which assumes that technology influences people who become mere users with no agency on their own. By using a metaphor of sushi, Nakayama explained that just as good sushi is made by a good chef and a good knife, the chef can repurpose those objects to harm others. “We have to remember,” Nakayama pointed out, “that the human is in control of technology.” Nakayama further explained that while there exists a threat of a deliberately harmful use of technology. While humans are in charge of technology, the growing entanglement of human life with technology and the growing dependency on technological solutions do not leave humans unaffected. As individuals become trapped in these new systems, “we must not allow technology to overrule people,” Nakayama added.

Speaking of digitalization and the global reach of the World Wide Web, Nakayama stated that “the internet is like a Pandora box, once opened, plenty of disturbing, problematic, and outright awful things popped out, but what has been left on the bottom, is hope.” Nakayama further added that the technological progress today is similar to the global growth of the Internet. In both cases, there is still a hope for a democratic, beneficial, and fair use. In order to turn hope into a practical solution, an international unity that fosters peace and collaboration is needed. Nakayama explained that from a geopolitical perspective of Japan, which is surrounded by hostile nuclear powers of China, North Korea, and Russia, a global democratic alliance is necessary to ensure peace and prosperity. Nakayama added that such an

alliance could be similar to the way in which EU responded to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, yet it should take a form of a global movement.

Ramu Damodaran, the Co-Chair of United Nations Centennial Initiative, drew a similarity between the power of navigation which King Henry VII's decree gave to John Cabot, the eponym of JCU, before John Cabot set off for his journey to America, and the power and freedom of navigation that we gave to technology in the twenty-first century. Damodaran argued that the drive to discover new lands is similar to the technological innovation today, as both are in principle a "scientific and entrepreneurial effort, driven by the same ambition for discovery and progress." To reconcile the pervasive power of technology with its use for peace, Damodaran outlined three lines of action, 1) cultivating personal element of peace; 2) protecting digital infrastructure that is necessary for that peace; 3) bolstering imperatives of sustainable competition between technological, scientific, corporate, and governmental communities.

Cultivating personal element of peace can be achieved by fostering education with a strong international focus. Damodaran referred to a speech made by Governor Dukakis which highlighted that "an international education is not a slogan but should be a standard of what and how to teach." Damodaran added that in the current troubling times to teach internationally, is "to teach the hearts and minds around the world, because while so far the world is not that much enlightened, it is definitely global." Protecting digital infrastructure is a global responsibility. Damodaran referred to the Roerich Pact, a treaty proposed by Nikolai Roerich for protection of artistic and scientific institutions and historic monuments in case of war, which was agreed upon internationally over eighty years ago. The same type of treaty, Damodaran argued, should be made for digital institutions and infrastructure. Protecting the right and access to truth and information is a governmental and institutional responsibility, and should not be in hands of private entrepreneurs, the danger of which has been illustrated by Elon Musk's Starlink use in Ukraine. In speaking of bolstering imperatives of sustainable competition between technological, scientific, corporate, and governmental communities, Damodaran referred to [Professor's Lapenta book on AI](#). Damodaran elaborated that to adequately prepare for AI misuses and promises, we need a governing body which can provide guidelines on the use of AI use in specific contexts. Damodaran concluded that "we need a body within UN that can respond to the crisis of the moment, perhaps a repurposed UN council that can spot the possibilities of AI while recognizing where exactly the line must be drawn."

Allain Cyntryn, the former CTO of Goldman Sachs, pointed out that computation and digital technology inverted millennially old social structures. Cyntryn explained that throughout history knowledge was passed over through mentorships within an identified social framework. Recent technological innovations, however, turned this structure upside down. "The main challenge today, which is the main challenge for young people," Cyntryn continued, is that while "there are still frameworks and structures in place that worked to the benefit of previous generations, which, while not perfect, promote peace and prosperity, we need new frameworks." Cyntryn added that when surveying the technological landscape today, one is faced with plenty of uncertainty. For example, the control over content moderation and

algorithmic recommendation system of Twitter, especially during elections, lacks transparency and regulation. The involvement of Musk's Starlink in the war in Ukraine is taking place outside of any regulatory frameworks.

While Cyntryn pointed out that there are already established structures, built over the decades, "it seems that these structures do not work anymore, and the legal processes do not adapt as quickly as the technological developments." Therefore, the challenge is to create "new variants of institutions such as UN and the EU that will allow technology to be engaged in a productive way for peace," Cyntryn said. Cyntryn referred to a quote from the signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Adams, "I studied war and politics so that my children can study engineering and math so that their children can study art and music." Cyntryn explained that just as John Adams lived in an uncertain time and felt that his responsibility was to establish frameworks for the future that the next generation can build off of, so it is our responsibility, and that of the younger generation, to create new frameworks for the future.

Roland Schatz, CEO of Media Tenor and the founder and CEO of United Nations Global Sustainability Index Institute (UNGSII) Foundation, noted that "globalization did not end on the 24th of February this year." Schatz pointed out that we can still speak of the beginning of global enlightenment if we remind ourselves of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). "SDGs were accepted and agreed upon by 193 presidents on UN General Assembly, which is an example of mankind agreeing on something which had never been done before on such a global scale," Schatz explained. He further argued that SDGs were agreed on by the leaders of authoritarianism and democracy alike, as they agreed to see SDGs as the compass for the wellbeing of people in their countries. Such like-mindedness on a global scale was further set in stone by an agreement upon 169 concrete targets, which were defined in detail. The targets allowed all of the involved parties to have a clearly defined set of goals, actions, and solutions to develop and implement by respective governments until a set deadline, which has been agreed to be December 2030. Schatz said that the development of SDGs is a reason to remain optimistic about the future.

"We, as a humanity, grew up talking about these SDGs," Schatz added. Schatz just participated in Egypt's Dar al-Ifta's 7th International Conference in Cairo, which took place weeks before Egypt's Climate Summit, where Muslim leaders agreed to take SDGs as a north star of guidance for their countries. Taking from his experience of crossing the Berlin Wall between Eastern and Western Germany, Schatz added that we should remember that "peace is not the absence of gunshots." He explained that while technology makes us think we are connected, we are most often fenced-off by the barriers in our minds. "Connection requires constant effort," Schatz said. Referring back to Emanuel Kant, the great thinker of Enlightenment, Schatz recalled Kant's definition of Enlightenment as "to have the courage to think and be in agreement with one's heart and mind." Schatz concluded that what we need today is a global effort to connect, with our hearts and minds, and with an aid of meaningful scientific technologies and data, as "we all need each other's help, and we all need to care to connect, as there are many great things that we can do if we do them together."

What we learn from history is that history can change, and so can humanity, concluded Professor Lapenta. After the years-long history of conflicts and competition, there is a hope for a change in conflict- and competition-based human history. “We have a roadmap,” Professor Lapenta said, “Sustainable Development Goals chart the route that we should follow towards a future that is more equal, based on solidarity and understanding of technology as a tool developed to solve problems and find global solutions.” Professor Lapenta added that “this symposium is just the beginning,” pointing out that the plan is yet to be fully developed and will require further global collaboration.

Tuan Nguyen, the CEO of Boston Global Forum, stated that the symposium is a “historical event in a historical city,” as it spawns a global collaboration through cities across the world, through universities such as MIT, Stanford, and JCU, in the first dialogue that follows the publication of the book *Remaking the World – The Age of Global Enlightenment*. The symposium is, Nguyen added, “a manifestation and materialization of the aim of the book, that is to bring together world leaders, innovators, and thinkers and to form a global alliance” that jointly develops frameworks and coordinates research on how to approach technology for peace. The first step in approaching technology as a set of tools that can help humanity but also make humanity better, is to see the potential of technology for global education. The starting point is thus to use technology for education in the spirit of the Global Enlightenment age. As a further engagement with the endeavors outlined in this symposium, the follow-up event will take place on December 12, 2022, at Harvard University. For more information, please check the BGF website.

The symposium “Technology for Peace and Democracy in the Age of Global Enlightenment” was an official event of the “Global Alliance for Digital Governance” (GADG), an initiative founded in 2021 by the Boston Global Forum and the World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid to promote dialogue among political and business leaders, governments, congresses, parliaments, national assemblies, think tanks, universities, and civil society organizations. The initiative, developed and coordinated by the Boston Global Forum, is represented in Rome by the Institute of Future and Innovation Studies and will organize conferences, forums, events, and high-level dialogues to foster human rights and democratic values in Technology, AI, and Digital Governance.

The symposium was also a part of the *Festival of Diplomacy*, which has been one of Italy’s most important forums for international diplomacy since 2009, with the support and patronage of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Commission and European Parliament Representation in Italy, more than 70 embassies, seven universities, and numerous scientific partners.