

Trivelis Institute Panel Discussion

Blurred Lines: Security in the Age of Hybrid Threats

18 May 2026, Grand Plaza, Ljubljana

CONCEPT NOTE

Europe is entering a period of sustained strategic uncertainty. The security environment is no longer defined solely by conventional military threats, but by a complex spectrum of hybrid activities that blur the line between peace and conflict. At the same time, the cohesion and predictability of traditional alliances—particularly NATO—are under pressure, raising fundamental questions about the future of collective defence and the role of European states within it.

Conflict has not disappeared—it has evolved. It increasingly manifests below the threshold of open warfare, penetrating societies across multiple domains: political, economic, technological, informational, and social. While cyber and disinformation campaigns are the most visible aspects, hybrid threats extend far beyond them, targeting governance systems, critical infrastructure, public trust, and national decision-making processes.

In this environment, credible defence capabilities of European states remain a foundational requirement for security. The ability to deter, protect, and respond across domains is indispensable. However, defence alone is no longer sufficient. Contemporary threats target not only military structures but the functioning of societies themselves. This makes societal resilience—understood as the capacity to absorb disruption, maintain core functions, and sustain political and social cohesion—equally critical. Security today is therefore defined by the interaction between defence capabilities and resilience, not by either in isolation.

Translating this dual requirement into practice, however, remains a significant challenge. Despite growing awareness, many countries are still grappling with how to define, measure, and operationalize both resilience and defence in the hybrid domain. The difficulty is further compounded by persistent problems in identifying and attributing hybrid threats, which creates vulnerabilities that directly affect national stability, sovereignty, and the effectiveness of democratic governance.

Against this backdrop, the Trivelis panel discussions will address key questions emerging from this shift, including: Are we already in a state of continuous, undeclared conflict—and simply unwilling to acknowledge it? If alliances are politically fragmented, can collective defence still function effectively? What does “defending the state” mean when the primary targets are institutions, trust, and perception?

Panel 1: Defending Europe: Alliances, Threats, and the New Security Reality

Europe's security environment is entering a phase of sustained uncertainty, requiring a reassessment of defence, alliances, and threat perception. This panel will explore how states interpret evolving threats and how these perceptions shape defence policy and preparedness. What does credible defence mean in an environment where the boundary between peace and conflict is increasingly blurred? Can NATO continue to provide a stable framework for collective security amid political and strategic pressures? And how are European countries adapting their capabilities and planning to the realities of contemporary conflict?

General Martin Herem, former Chief of Defence, Estonia

Major General Boštjan Močnik, Chief of Defence, Slovenia

Moderator: **Jure Tepina**, Head of digital content CME Adria, Slovenia

Panel 2: Invisible Battles: Hybrid Threats Across Cyber, Information and Society

Conflict is increasingly unfolding below the threshold of open warfare, targeting societies across multiple domains. This panel will examine how hybrid threats operate across cyber, information, economic, and political spaces, and how they reshape national security. Are current threat perceptions aligned with the nature of hybrid activity, or are key vulnerabilities still overlooked? How do such operations affect internal stability and sovereignty? And can resilience and defence capabilities be effectively integrated to respond to complex, multi-domain pressure?

Martha Turnbull, COI Director, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), Finland

Michael Zinkanell, Director, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, Austria

Aleksandra Petrovič, Head of Modern Security Challenges Division, Defence Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Defence, Slovenia

Moderator: **Katja Geršak**, Head of Trivelis, Institute for Defence, Security and Resilience, Slovenia

General Martin Herem is a retired Estonian general who served as Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces from 2018 to 2024. Over a military career spanning more than three decades, he held key leadership roles including Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces and Commandant of the Estonian National Defence College. A graduate of Estonia's senior military education system, he was the first alumnus of the national defence college to rise to the top command position. Following his military service, he joined Milrem Robotics and Frankenburg Technologies as a military strategy advisor, focusing on integrating operational experience—particularly lessons from Ukraine—into the development of next-generation defence technologies.

Major General Boštjan Močnik is Chief of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces, a position he assumed in 2025. Since joining the armed forces in 1998, he has held numerous senior command and strategic leadership roles, including Force Commander and Commander of the 1st Brigade. He has also served in key positions within Slovenia's General Staff and Ministry of Defence, focusing on capability development, strategic planning, and defence policy. His international experience includes deployments to Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he has completed advanced studies in international security and strategic leadership in the United Kingdom.

Martha Turnbull is the Director of the Hybrid Influence Community of Interest at the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. In this role, Martha oversees the Centre's programme of work on disinformation, deterrence, non-state actors, election interference, and the Western Balkans. Martha is seconded to the Centre from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office where she has spent the past 15 years working on various national security issues, including hybrid threats and counter-terrorism.

Michael Zinkanell-Süss is the Director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), one of Austria's leading think tanks on European security, defence, and foreign policy. His work focuses on the geopolitical dimensions of European security, with particular expertise in analysing hybrid threats, disinformation, and cyber operations. In this capacity, he is responsible for the Institute's strategic direction and operational management, leads the coordination of research initiatives, and provides policy advice to national and European decision-makers on emerging security challenges.

Aleksandra Petrović is the Head of Modern Security Challenges Division at Slovenia's Ministry of Defence, where she focuses on civil capabilities, hybrid threats, geospatial support, and space policy. A law graduate of the University of Ljubljana, she began her career at the Ministry of Defence in 2001 as an expert in public international law and later served as Head of the Department for Legislation and International Legal Affairs. Throughout her career, she has contributed to the drafting of key legislation and policy documents and has been actively involved in national and international expert groups on international humanitarian law, aviation safety, and space. She is also a frequent speaker on legal affairs, hybrid threats, space domain and civil-military cooperation.

AGENDA

10:30 – 11:00

Registration

11:00 – 11:20

Opening: Katja Geršak, Head of Trivelis, Institute for Defence, Security and Resilience

11:20 – 12:30

Panel 1: Defending Europe: Alliances, Threats, and the New Security Reality

General Martin Herem, former Chief of Defence of Estonia

Major General Boštjan Močnik, Chief of Defence, Slovenia

Moderator: **Jure Tepina**, Head of digital content CME Adria

12:30 – 13:15

Networking / lunch

13:15 – 14:45

Panel 2: Invisible Battles: Hybrid Threats Across Cyber, Information and Society

Martha Turnbull, COI Director, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE)

Michael Zinkanell, Director, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy

Aleksandra Petrovič, Head of Modern Security Challenges Division, Defence Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Defence, Slovenia

Moderator: **Katja Geršak**, Head of Trivelis, Institute for Defence, Security and Resilience

14:45

Closing
