SDF BELGRADE 2026

EUROPE'S NEXT CHAPTER

Competitiveness • Supply Chains • Innovation

Europe is entering a defining period for its economic and political future. Geopolitical fragmentation, technological disruption, changing global trade patterns, energy insecurity and growing pressure on natural resources are reshaping the foundations on which European prosperity has been built. At the same time, Europe faces a persistent competitiveness challenge, characterised by slower productivity growth, investment gaps and increasing competition from the United States, China and other emerging economic powers.

The choices made during this decade will determine Europe's ability to remain competitive, innovative and strategically relevant in a rapidly changing world. They will also shape its capacity to preserve economic prosperity while delivering the energy, industrial and sustainability transformations already underway. SDF Belgrade 2026, under the theme "Europe's Next Chapter", will bring together leaders from government, business, academia, international organisations and finance to examine how Europe can strengthen its competitiveness, secure its supply chains and accelerate innovation in an increasingly fragmented global economy.

Competitiveness is at the centre of this debate. Europe must address productivity and investment gaps while creating the conditions for companies to innovate, scale and compete globally. This challenge cannot, however, be separated from the transformation taking place across energy, technology, trade and natural resources. Energy costs directly affect industrial competitiveness, while access to critical materials and resilient supply chains increasingly determines economic security.

At the same time, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies are transforming productivity, business models and the organisation of industries. Europe's ability to translate its scientific and technological capabilities into commercially successful innovation will be critical to its future position in the global economy. Innovation will also be essential to developing new energy systems, more efficient production processes and higher-value industries capable of competing internationally. Supply chains represent another fundamental element of Europe's next chapter. The period of assuming uninterrupted access to inexpensive energy, raw materials and global production networks has ended. Geopolitical tensions, trade disputes and strategic dependencies are forcing governments and businesses to reconsider where and how goods are produced, which resources are strategically important and how economic resilience can be strengthened without abandoning the benefits of international trade.

These changes also require a broader understanding of the relationship between economic prosperity and the resources on which it depends. Economic growth has historically relied on natural resources and ecosystems whose economic contribution is rarely fully reflected in conventional indicators. Protecting natural capital, improving resource productivity and developing more circular economic models are therefore becoming increasingly relevant to competitiveness, supply-chain resilience and long-term economic security.

For European businesses, this transformation is already changing the competitive landscape. Energy costs, access to finance, technological capabilities, regulatory requirements, secure supply chains and the efficient use of materials will increasingly determine which companies and economies succeed. The transition will require significant investment, but it can also create new markets, technologies, business models and industrial opportunities.

The Western Balkans are an important part of this conversation. Located at the intersection of European markets, energy networks and industrial value chains, the region has an opportunity to participate more deeply in Europe's evolving economic architecture. For Serbia, this raises an important question: how can the country use its proximity to the European market, industrial base, human capital and investment potential to move towards higher-value and more competitive economic activities?

SDF Belgrade 2026 will approach these questions from both European and regional perspectives. The Forum will examine the future of European competitiveness, the restructuring of global and European supply chains, artificial intelligence and industrial innovation, energy security and transformation, finance and investment, resource and food security, and the position of Serbia and the Western Balkans within Europe's changing economy.

The Forum will also connect international debate with practical policy development. The Circular Competitiveness in Serbia initiative will form part of this wider conversation, examining how resource productivity, circularity, innovation and industrial transformation can contribute to Serbia's competitiveness, exports, investment and long-term economic prosperity.

SDF Belgrade 2026 is designed not simply as a conference about the challenges Europe faces, but as a platform for discussing the choices that come next, and the opportunities that can emerge from them. Europe's next chapter will depend on its ability to compete, innovate and build greater resilience into the supply chains, technologies and economic systems on which its future prosperity depends.