


# CROSS - BORDER DIALOGUE 2025



**HAINBURG  
AN  
DER DONAU**

**A 3 DAY  
INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE**

**30.04  
1.05  
02.05**

# INTRODUCTION

**Dear readers, partners, and friends,**

The Cross-Border Dialogue 2025 is officially in the books—and we couldn't be prouder of how it turned out. Over three days, we had the pleasure of organizing and hosting a unique gathering of engaged youth, regional leaders, policy experts, and business partners from Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia. Together, we proved that borders are not barriers when united by a common purpose.

Although the Iron Curtain fell more than 35 years ago, its shadows still linger in subtle ways. My grandfather had to flee his hometown in Czechia in 1945, only returning after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Even though I share a history with Czechia, I rarely connected with our neighbours till my adulthood.

In the spirit of Club Alpbach Lower Austria's "Dialog.Format", we took things a step further to build bridges across the border, through shared experiences, new friendships, and collaborative work during the Cross-Border Dialogue. The energy during the design thinking sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Day two and three saw six groups tackling real-life challenges developed with our project partners—thank you for your support and trust. The results ranged from policy toolkits to new initiative websites and strategic plans, and the feedback confirmed what we hoped: this format works, and it's needed.



**JAKOB HUTTER**

**HEAD ORGANIZER**

**CBD 2025**

# INTRODUCTION

“

WE'RE HAPPY TO ANNOUNCE THE NEXT STEP: THE FOUNDING OF THE CROSS-BORDER DIALOGUE ASSOCIATION, WITH ITS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SET FOR JUNE 20.

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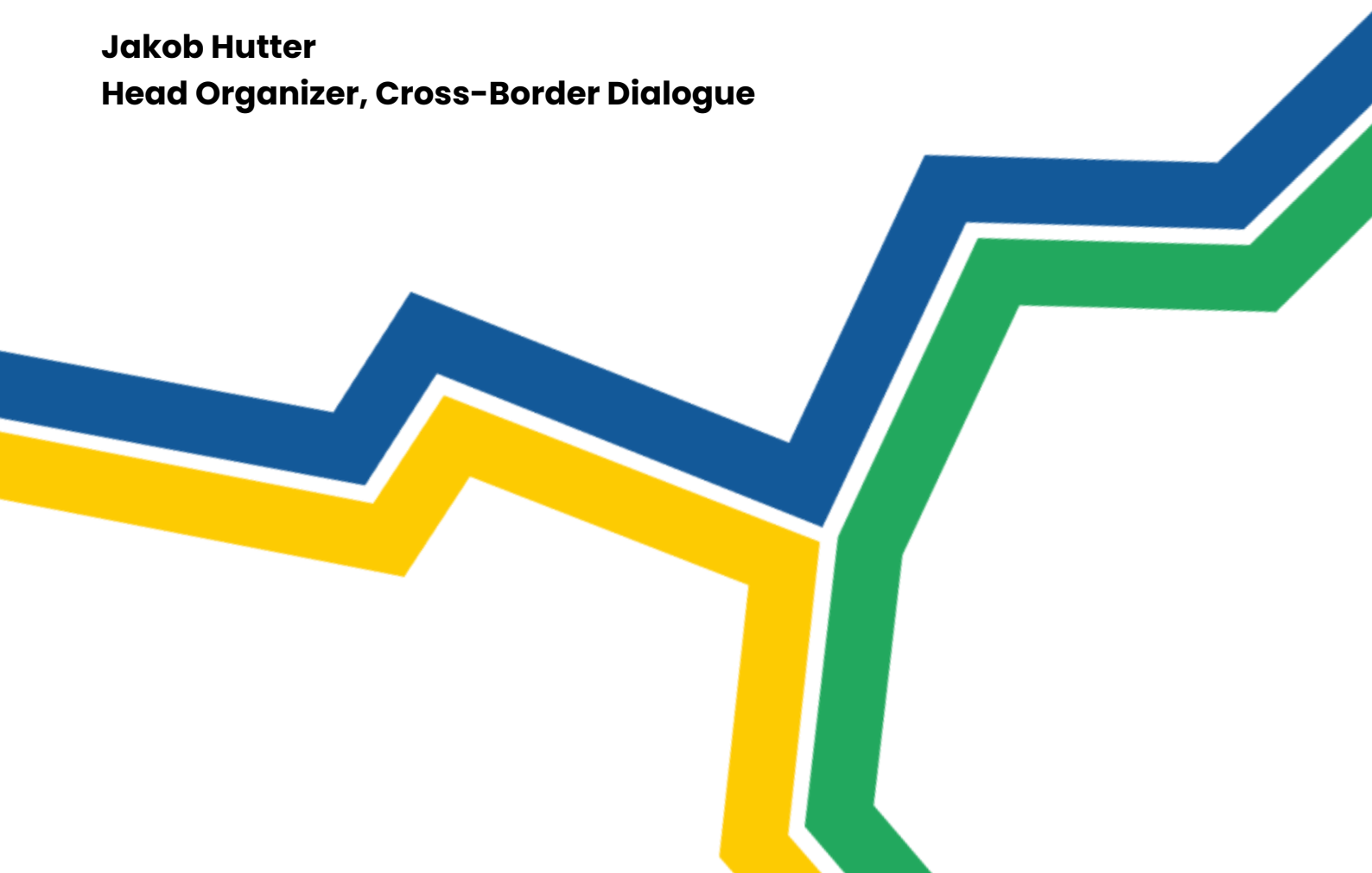
This structure will help us turn a powerful event into a lasting movement. And with an invitation from Petra Korlaar, Vice-mayor of Mikulov, we already have a home for next year's edition.

This is the start of a growing network of young Europeans working together for a more united, resilient, democratic future. Our thanks go out to everyone who made this possible: our team, our partners, our sponsors—and above all, our participants. You brought the spirit, the ideas, and the drive!

See you at the next crossroads,

**Jakob Hutter**

**Head Organizer, Cross-Border Dialogue**



# BACKGROUND

The Cross-Border Dialogue (CBD) is a trilateral initiative uniting Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia to address shared regional challenges, foster cross-border collaboration, and advance European values. Co-hosted by Club Alpbach Lower Austria and Club Alpbach Czechia & Slovakia, the CBD serves as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange and co-creation of innovative, actionable solutions to pressing issues in the region.

## Key Components of the CBD:

- **Collaborative Framework:** Engages participants from diverse sectors and nationalities to bridge borders and disciplines.
- **Design-Thinking Hackathon:** A hands-on core event where students, young professionals, entrepreneurs, and community representatives collaborate intensively to solve challenges posed by real-world partners.
- **Impact-Driven Outcomes:** Focuses on generating scalable, sustainable solutions with long-term benefits for the region.

By combining grassroots expertise with cross-border perspectives, the CBD empowers participants to drive tangible progress while strengthening regional networks and shared European ideals.

## NUMBERS

3

DAYS

>1000000

PEOPLE REACHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

6

CHALLENGES

34

EFA CLUBS REACHED

60

PARTICIPANTS

130

OPENING CEREMONY ATTENDEES

# OUR TEAM

This year's Cross-Border Dialogue Conference was organized, prepared, and facilitated by the following team:

**JAKOB HUTTER**

**BENJAMIN RABL**

**OTTO EDEN**

**HARALD SCHÖNY**

**KRYŠTOF ČIŽMÁŘ**

**LAURA LANGEDER**

**PRATHAMESH PATIL**

**ADAM KLOKOČKA**

**GEORG SCHMIDT**

**JAN TVRDOŇ**

**ELKE PICHLER**

**ELENA MOROZOVA**

**POLINA URMAN**

**NAĐA MARJANOVIC**

**MONIKA ZAHNT**

**PETER WOLFRAMM**

**KATHARINA ALRAM**

**KRISTIAN STANKOV**

**FELIX AMBROS**

**ANDREAS BRANDSTÄTTER**

**MARKUS FISCHER**

**MONIKA VÁCLAVKOVÁ**

**STEFAN HUBER**

**ERICH WESZELITS**

**TOBIAS LANGER**

**CHRISTINA KLOPF**



# CONFERENCE DESIGN

IN THE DYNAMIC CHANGES SHAPING EUROPE TODAY, HOW CAN THE THREE NEIGHBOURS AUSTRIA, CZECHIA, AND SLOVAKIA FACE EXCITING CHALLENGES AND UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEEPEN THEIR COLLABORATION



The Cross-Border Dialogue (CBD) conference, a three-day event, blended formal discussions, workshops, and networking to drive cross-border innovation. Day 1 opened with the Opening Ceremony, which included a political panel and a scholarship award, attended by regional governors, EU reps, and academics.

Evening networking fostered connections. Days 2–3 focused on hackathon-style design-thinking sessions. Students, entrepreneurs, and community leaders iterated solutions during structured breaks, meals, and creative activities. The final day featured a "World Café" and "Idea Fair" for teams to refine and pitch actionable solutions.

## Outcome-Oriented Structure

The conference emphasized collaboration and practical results. By integrating interactive workshops, and social engagement, the design fostered a dynamic environment for co-creation. The blend of formal discussions, creative sessions, and informal networking ensured participants left with strengthened regional networks and concrete solutions, reflecting the CBD's commitment to advancing European values through grassroots innovation.

# OPENING CEREMONY

TO WELCOME AND OPEN THE CROSS BORDER DIALOGUE,  
WE INVITED **HIGH-LEVEL SPEAKERS** TO INSPIRE THE  
PARTICIPANTS AND OUR GUESTS.

ON THE PANEL DISCUSSION TITLED **“STRONG EUROPE  
BEGINS WITH CONNECTED REGIONS”** SPOKE:

**LUKAS MANDL**, MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**PETRA KORLAAR**, VICE MAYOR OF MIKULOV

**JAN GROLICH**, GOVERNOR OF THE  
SOUTH MORAVIAN REGION

**MICHAELA FRITZ**, FORUM ALPBACH ADVISORY BOARD  
MEMBER



# CHALLENGES

**ENERGY:** REFRAMING RENEWABLE ENERGY AS A SHARED OPPORTUNITY, NOT A DISRUPTION.

**HOW CAN WE SHIFT PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY FROM 'DISRUPTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE' TO 'COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY'?**

The Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) effect stems from fear, misinformation, and a lack of tangible benefits for locals. This challenge focuses on community engagement strategies that showcase the direct and indirect advantages of renewable energy—such as lower electricity costs, job creation, or local investment. How can we create compelling narratives, experiences, or incentives that change the way people perceive and interact with renewables?



**ENERGY group with the mayor of Hainburg a.d. Donau, Johannes Gumprecht**

**SECURITY:** STRENGTHENING DEFENSE IN SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE WAYS THAT ENGAGE AND EARN PUBLIC SUPPORT.

**HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN OUR DEFENSE CAPABILITIES IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY THAT INCLUDES THE GENERAL POPULATION AND GAINS ITS SUPPORT?**

In an era of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, maintaining a strong and capable military is more important than ever.

However, many countries are struggling with recruitment shortfalls, a declining interest in military service, and the need to expand both professional armed forces and active reserve units.

This challenge focuses on developing innovative and sustainable solutions to bolster military recruitment, enhance national preparedness, and address the financial constraints that come with such efforts.



## **DEMOCRACY:** REINFORCING DEMOCRATIC VALUES THROUGH MUTUAL LEARNING FROM CENTRALIST AND FEDERALIST GOVERNANCE MODELS.

### **HOW CAN WE BOOST DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE REGIONS - LEARNING FROM THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO GOVERNANCE: CENTRALISM & FEDERALISM?**

It's about examining how Austria's federal structure and Czechia's/Slovakia's more centralized governance approaches can inform each other to strengthen regional democratic engagement and decision-making.



## **MOBILITY:** DESIGNING ECO-FRIENDLY "LAST-MILE" CONNECTIONS TO LINK RURAL AREAS WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACROSS AUSTRIA, CZECHIA, AND SLOVAKIA.

### **HOW CAN WE DESIGN INNOVATIVE, ECO-FRIENDLY "LAST-MILE" SOLUTIONS TO BETTER CONNECT RURAL AREAS IN AUSTRIA, CZECHIA, AND SLOVAKIA WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORKS?**



This challenge focuses on the crucial but often overlooked issue of the "last mile" — the final stretch between someone's home and the nearest public transport stop. In many rural areas, this distance is too long to walk and too inconvenient or unsafe to cycle, leaving people with little choice but to use private cars. As a result, public transport remains underutilized, even if regional or national networks are well-developed. By finding creative, sustainable ways to bridge this last gap, we can make public transport more attractive, accessible, and viable in rural settings.

## **TOURISM:** BOOSTING CROSS-BORDER TOURISM THROUGH STRONGER COLLABORATION WITH CZECH AND SLOVAK PARTNERS.



### **WHAT STRATEGIES CAN STRENGTHEN CROSS-BORDER TOURISM AND COLLABORATION WITH CZECH AND SLOVAK PARTNERS?**

The Niederösterreich-CARD (Lower Austria CARD) is an excursion and leisure pass, offering free entry to 365 attractions. While it is well established in Austria, only about 1–2% of its customers currently come from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, highlighting untapped potential in these markets.

## **HISTORY:** RECONNECTING OUR REGIONS THROUGH THE STORIES, PLACES, AND LEGACIES WE SHARE.

### **HOW CAN OUR REGIONS RECONNECT OVER OUR SHARED HISTORY?**

Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia share centuries of intertwined history—open borders fostering cultural exchange, literature and music flowing freely, and architectural heritage reflecting a common past. Today, within the European Union, our nations are once again united. Yet, the 20th century saw divisions that left lasting fractures.

This challenge invites participants to explore which historical bridges—whether cultural, intellectual, or societal—can be rebuilt to strengthen our regional ties and reinforce a united Europe. How can we reconnect in the face of rising national sentiments? What lessons from our shared past can inspire a more cooperative future?



# RESULTS

## ENERGY:

The group proposed practical ways to turn renewable energy projects into community opportunities. They suggested involving residents directly in planning decisions to address concerns, while also blending art and culture into projects—like turning wind turbines into eye-catching art pieces—to spark local pride. To highlight real-world benefits, they recommended education campaigns and an online platform connecting communities with renewable energy experts, focusing on lower costs and job opportunities. Internships and scholarships for green energy careers were also proposed to help create lasting local benefits, shifting mindsets from resistance to enthusiasm.

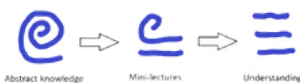
### Art & Culture

From "Not in my Backyard!"



To "Please in my Backyard!"

### Community Education



### Participatory d



### Energy Comm Matchmaking



## SECURITY:

The group focused on redefining security as a shared, inclusive effort that benefits communities. They proposed expanding public understanding through education programs that blend military and civic lessons on safety, while promoting partnerships between smaller European nations to collaborate on crisis plans, infrastructure, and training. Practical ideas included dual-use infrastructure (like hospitals that serve civilian and defense needs) and framing disaster relief as part of national security to build trust. To address funding and innovation gaps, they suggested a "European DARPA" for defense tech and transparency in cybersecurity to reduce risks. By linking security to everyday resilience and community benefits, the group aimed to boost public support and recruitment.

## DEMOCRACY:

The group proposed strengthening democracy by blending lessons from federalist and centralist models, focusing on youth engagement through cross-border school programs, student housing initiatives, and "Democracy Ambassadors" to boost participation. They emphasized civil society collaboration—like grassroots projects and NGO platforms—to rebuild trust, alongside safer digital tools (e.g., secure

eGovernment platforms) to simplify civic engagement.

Local reforms, such as participatory budgeting and cross-border political parties, aimed to decentralize power, while minority rights efforts—including legal protections, intercultural festivals, and anti-discrimination training—sought to foster inclusion. Together, these strategies addressed polarization and distrust by linking EU-level reforms to community-level action

### DemROADcracy



# RESULTS

## MOBILITY:

The group tackled rural “last-mile” transport gaps by proposing stronger collaboration between local and regional governments, including regular meetings to align priorities and national funding for pilot projects like eco-friendly shuttles or bike-sharing. A shared knowledge platform would help communities adopt proven solutions, while reviving the “Centropo” initiative—a cross-border network with pooled budgets and infrastructure—aims to streamline regional mobility.

These steps address challenges like elderly isolation and car dependency by making rural transport safer, more accessible, and less reliant on informal support networks.



## TOURISM:

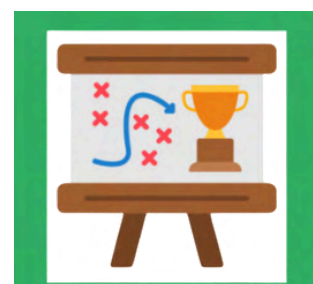
The group proposed expanding the Lower Austria Card’s appeal to Czech and Slovak visitors by partnering with travel influencers, agencies, and local businesses to highlight regional attractions and discounts. Upgrades like a multilingual audio guide, gamified features (badges, leaderboards), and a “Bring a Buddy” initiative aim to boost engagement. The app would also offer recurring events, progress tracking across years, and special deals to encourage repeat use. By blending digital tools with cross-border collaboration, the plan seeks to transform the card into a must-have for exploring Lower Austria and neighboring regions.



## HISTORY:

The group created a “Playbook for Cross-Border Life” to transform border areas into hubs of collaboration by reconnecting shared histories. The guide encourages towns to start small—like partnering on tourism or heritage projects—and involves schools, museums, and cultural groups to revive local ties. Success stories would be highlighted in media to build pride, while historical examples of cooperation (e.g., music, architecture) inspire fresh ideas.

By framing borders as opportunities, not divides, the playbook aims to counter nationalism with practical, community-driven unity.



## Governing the In-Between

Playbook for cross-border life in the heart of Europe

# TESTIMONIALS AND MORE



# TESTIMONIALS



**PETER KOVAČ**  
**SAP CONSULTANT, MASTERS STUDENT**

Cross-Border Dialogue in Hainburg was a great opportunity to meet new like-minded, active people and to be exposed to new viewpoints and ideas about the limits and possibilities of cooperation between our three countries.



**ISABELLA GOGER**  
**BEARING POINT CONSULTANT**

The event brought together highly driven individuals who brought remarkable focus and curiosity – and channeled that energy into tackling real, complex challenges that go beyond borders.



**MARKUS FISCHER**  
**SENIOR REGULATORY ADVISOR, ØRSTED**

The CBD brings together young changemakers, local leaders and regional experts from Austria, Czechia and Slovakia. As co-facilitator, I shared my energy-sector expertise, giving an overview of possible renewable energy opportunities.



**ZUZANA DOLEŽALOVÁ**  
**VIENNA BUSINESS AGENCY, BRNO**

The conference made me feel so confident about how strong we can be once the young ambitious and determined people come together to drive the change. This special gathering was, I believe, a strong engine for further executions with the use of new contacts and like-minded people.



**MICHAELA MACKO**  
**MONDI SOLUTION ENGINEER, MASTERS STUDENT**

For me, as a Czech person living in Austria, taking part in Cross-Border Dialogue was an amazing opportunity to properly understand the value of Austrian neutrality, what security challenges we share in the region and gather fresh ideas on how to tackle them. And most importantly, now I feel more confident and motivated to share these insights further!

# OUR PARTNERS



 Bundesministerium  
Klimaschutz, Umwelt,  
Energie, Mobilität,  
Innovation und Technologie



# OUTLOOK FOR THE NEXT CBD

**LOCATION: MIKULOV, SOUTHERN MORAVIA**  
**DATE (TBC): 23.4 – 25. APRIL 2026**

We are hearing the public suggestion by Jan Grolich, Governor of the Southern Moravian region and Petra Korlaar, Vice-mayor of the Town of Mikulov.

Our team is dedicated to organize this event once again, connecting people and partners from our regions to build a stronger european region.



**KRYŠTOF ČÍŽMÁŘ**

HEAD ORGANIZER  
CBD 2026

**INTERESTED? JOIN US!**

