



A secretive annual meeting attended by the world's elite has A.I. top of the agenda

Description

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, is one among a number of business and political leaders set to join the annual Bilderberg Meeting in Lisbon, Portugal.

Win Mcnamee | Getty Images News | Getty Images

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman will join forces with key leadership from companies like Microsoft_ and Google_ this week as a secretive meeting of the business and political elite kick-starts in Lisbon, Portugal.

Artificial intelligence will top the agenda as the ChatGPT chief meets with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, DeepMind head Demis Hassabis and former Google CEO Eric Schmidt at the annual Bilderberg Meeting.

The tech titans will be joined by political heavyweights including former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba for a range of discussions spanning international relations, trade, energy and finance.

All in, around 130 participants from 23 countries are set to attend the private meeting — a similar number to previous years. Pfizer_ CEO Albert Bourla, BP_ chief Bernard Looney, TotalEnergies_ CEO Patrick Pouyanne, investor Peter Thiel and a number of EU politicians will also be there.

The three-day event, which this year runs from Thursday to Sunday, is shrouded in mystery, with clandestine talks held behind closed doors and subject to Chatham House rules, meaning the identity and affiliation of speakers must not be disclosed.

That has sparked conspiracy theories, similar to those leveled against high-level meetings like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, by those who claim attendees are seeking to establish a “new world order.” However, the event’s organizers say that the discrete nature of it is to allow for greater freedom of discussion.

What is on the agenda in 2023?

Key topics up for discussion at this year’s meeting were published by its organizers Thursday, giving an insight into what it deems the most pressing issues in global affairs:

- A.I.
- Banking system
- China
- Energy transition
- Europe
- Fiscal challenges
- India
- Industrial policy and trade
- NATO
- Russia
- Transnational threats
- Ukraine
- U.S. leadership

The talks come as the rollout of artificial intelligence tools such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Google’s Bard have added to mounting concerns around the rapid development of technology, with Altman called to testify before the U.S. Senate on Tuesday.

Meantime, the ongoing war in Ukraine and concerns over rising China threats have become a source of continued discussion among Western leaders, with signs of division in U.S. and European policy rising over recent months.

What is Bilderberg?

Now in its 69th year, the Bilderberg Meeting was established in 1954 to “foster dialogue” between Europe and North America.

Today, around two-thirds of participants come from Europe and the rest from North America, with approximately a quarter from politics and government and the remainder from other fields, according to a statement on its website. Around one-fifth are women.



And, as ever, discretion is key. Attendees take part as individuals, rather than in any official capacity, and no official detailed agenda is disclosed nor are the discussions reportable.

“The Bilderberg Meeting is a forum for informal discussions about major issues. The meetings are held under the Chatham House Rule, which states that participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s) nor any other participant may be revealed,” the organizers said in a press release Thursday.

The event is organized by the Foundation Bilderberg Meeting, which itself is governed by a rotating steering committee, and is funded through a variety of means. There is no attendance fee for the event, though participation is by invitation only and participants are expected to take care of their own travel and accommodation costs.

“Annual contributions by Steering Committee members cover the yearly costs of the small secretariat. The budget of the secretariat is limited to staff and administrative costs. The hospitality costs of the annual meeting are the responsibility of the Steering Committee member(s) of the host country,” a statement on its website added.

Correction: Dmytro Kuleba is Ukraine’s foreign minister and Peter Thiel is an investor. An earlier version misspelled their names.

by Karen Gilchrist

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