

Chapter III

THE WORLD AROUND EUROPE

Europe, at least until the mid-1950s, not only remained the world's most developed continent, it also, and more importantly, encompassed the world's economically most powerful countries (aside from the United States). The same indeed held true for such areas as education and technological or intellectual progress. In short, Europe as a continent was at the forefront of development.

The world changed quite fundamentally in the second half of the twentieth century under the influence of the transformations that took place or, strictly speaking, gathered pace in that period. As a consequence of those changes, Europe gradually started to undergo a certain marginalization. However, this word does not capture a complete picture of the complex situation, because Europe's importance is certainly dwindling and probably changing compared to the past, i.e. it has ceased to lead the world in many domains in the way it did for the past several centuries, and yet at the same time it is still a region that is regarded as highly developed in social and economic terms, a dream destination for numerous migrants.

1. Old and new powers

Countries have always differed from one another in terms of their wealth, population, economic potential, military power, scientific and intellectual resources, and many other distinguishing factors. Such divisions certainly remain valid in the modern era, as they have in recent centuries. We begin our discussion of old and new powers here with this issue, only so as to stress that this phenomenon has a long tradition. In this context, we should point to the pace of change and the wide variety of elements that define today's powers. In analyzing the modern era, we have arbitrarily decided to consider it starting from around mid-twentieth century and therefore assumed that the main components of our assessment would be as follows: economic potential measured by GDP, population potential, military potential, and intellectual/technological potential.

Before we move on to a brief presentation of these factors, however, a certain succinct commentary is in order: namely, pointing out that the role and importance of specific states have undergone rapid change over the past several decades

may be banal, but it is extremely important. Changes in individual factors have not been identical – some have changed rapidly, others more slowly. Hence the need for the constant corrections of the role and importance of individual components in the comprehensive picture of the power represented by specific countries. Likewise, it appears expedient to introduce an additional division into old vs. new powers, the latter being a product of the developments of the past several decades. In the past, or at least until World War II, the old powers were connected with the European cultural system, whereas the new powers are the result of the turbulent developments and various transformations that took place mainly or only in Asia (especially if we take into account the most powerful components of modern-day development).

There are many methods of gauging the relative strength of countries. For the considerations below, the selection of a particular method does not pose a fundamental or major problem, so we will present only some of the detailed components, plus one that is more general.

GDP in 2016 measured in nominal prices. The top 12 countries by GDP are as follows: the United States, China, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, India, Italy, Brazil, Canada, South Korea, and Russia. If we look at this list from the perspective of the division into old and new powers, we see that it includes seven old and five new powers. We can also look at this problem from a more general perspective, namely only in the context of Europe, or strictly speaking Europe's share in the overall world GDP – which stood at 40.71% in 1970, but fell to 24.58% in 2016. This shows the magnitude of the changes that took place over a relatively short period of time. In this context, we should point out that the main beneficiary of those transformations was Asia, whose share in the world's GDP rose from 14.89% in 1970 to 35.98% in 2016.

Population numbers in 2012. The top 12 most populous countries are as follows: China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, Mexico, and Ethiopia. It is immediately apparent that this picture differs fundamentally from the list of countries according to GDP. These 12 countries include only three old powers, namely the United States, Russia, and Japan. We should remember that population size is one of the most important kinds of development potential, which can be observed in China and India. In this context, we should also stress two important issues: this situation results from an already visible demographic boom that has been initiated on a large scale, while the same time, this boom has triggered a large influx of refugees from Africa and Asia to Europe.

Nuclear weapons as a sign of military power. The five permanent members of the “nuclear club” are China, France, Russia, the UK, and the United States. In addition, there also four states that have nuclear weapons at their disposal: India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel. Apart from that, there are several countries that have nuclear programs at various levels of advancement.

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

Military power in the general sense. Here, we include several components, such as GDP, number of soldiers, and social approval for a strategy of bolstering military potential. Other factors include weapons spending, demographics, and geography. On this analysis, we arrive at the following list of countries: the United States, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Russia, Germany, France, and Canada.

What conclusions can we draw from these very general and by far incomplete considerations in terms of the assessment of Europe's condition, development potential, and security? First of all, European powers have numerous increasingly powerful rivals in the global arena, among members of both the EU and Europe as a whole.

Secondly, the gap in economic development between specific non-European powers, except for the United States, is slowly starting to shrink. It is hard to make forecasts in this respect, but in the course of a decade, the main Asian countries, even if we omit Japan and South Korea, will start to compete against Europe in terms of not only the GDP but also standards of living, in particular technological progress, which is already present in certain spheres.

Thirdly and finally, we should factor in the eventuality that the demographic boom may result in what can be referred to as an invasion of refugees in Europe in the course of the next two or three decades, thus sparking off conflicts, not only cultural conflicts but also ones that might endanger Europe's security to a serious degree.

2. Problems of post-colonial states

The most important changes that have taken place in the modern era include civilizational turning points, related to the transition from the industrial stage of civilization to a knowledge-based society and to the degradation of the agrarian civilization. In today's world, the degradation of the agrarian civilization is particularly distinctive in terms of its characteristics, and in the context considered here, we feel we should pay special attention to its consequences. If we look at this process from the perspective of the past half-century, we must above all stress that it has encompassed nearly two-thirds of the world's population. However, this world, largely the post-colonial world, has different faces. Some countries, in particular in Asia, have already risen to the status of important players, both political and economic ones. This holds true for China and India, but there are more and more examples of such countries, especially in Asia.

However, we should also not the existence of many post-colonial countries, especially in Africa, whose rise to independence is not fully permanent, nor does it guarantee socioeconomic advancements, let alone a lasting political order. Independence was gained in different ways, from peaceful ones to wars of different magnitude that continue until the present day.

Without performing a broader analysis of a wide range of factors that determine the specific characteristics of this group of countries, we can list the fundamental problems that highlight the differences in their nature, resulting both from their colonial past and from their violent rise to independence. In the case of post-colonial states, it is hard to say which of them might have had the potential for gradual and evolutionary development in the past. Hence, these countries have both certain distinguishing characteristics and general characteristics that apply to the development of other countries.

Institutions and methods of institutionalization. One fundamental aspect of every state is whether it has relevant and permanent institutions that secure the general and permanent prerequisites for development. In the conditions of colonial conquests, those institutions, first of all, resulted from the efforts of the colonial power that controlled a specific territory and, secondly, were imitative, both while under colonial dependence and after the gaining of independence. As a rule, what emerged was a hybrid model that never offered the possibility of consistent and relatively efficient development. There were two reasons for this situation. One of them was the territory inherited by a specific country after its rise to independence. Here, we consider cases in which a country's borders resulted from colonial conquests, when the territory within those borders was home to not just a single ethnic group but two or more such groups, often hostile with respect to one another. On the other hand, the gaining of independence was often followed by an influx of foreign capital, whose decision-makers then exerted a significant impact on the method and character of state institutionalization.

These countries were characterized by different levels of development resulting from colonial policy. In the era of colonial conquests, development was largely connected with the particular resources available in a specific territory, which essentially determined the economic policy of the power that controlled that territory. This had substantial influence on what domains were developed and on the development of the hard and soft infrastructure, education, health care, and the condition of old and new cities. This was also the reason why what the new states inherited varied considerably across countries as well as determined, and will determine for a long time, the development possibilities of those countries, from the perspective of not only socioeconomic development but also relations with neighboring countries, especially when a certain part of the main ethnic group remains outside the borders of a specific country. This creates and will create conflicts, often ones that transform into armed clashes of various degrees of intensity.

Cultural diversity of post-colonial countries. As we observed earlier, the issue of cultural systems and their impact on development plays an important role, especially in less developed economies, where the quality of education differs from the world's standards. For that reason, the systems of values and the nature of bonds are largely defined by cultural systems, rather than by modern informa-

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

tion mediums and networks. Also, we should remember that the stimuli for the development of cultural systems and for their social ties stem chiefly from the past and to a lesser degree from modern-era experiences.

At the same time, cultural systems have an overwhelming impact on the nature of the elite, whose members are more likely to come from clan leaders than be a result of the education of modern society. This largely determines the directions of development and privileges enjoyed by members of the same tribe, especially family members in the broad sense, at the expense of other groups, as well as acceptance of and involvement in corruption processes. Also, this has an overwhelming impact on the relations with neighboring countries, where memories of the past, especially negative memories, play an important and often even decisive role.

Without performing a detailed analysis of cultural systems, we can generally assume that in most cases they limit or even hinder the emergence of a modern state and society. Based on European experiences, especially in less developed countries, we can reach the conclusion that modernization, especially the modernization of societies, will be a long-lasting process spread out over many decades.

Sources of modern development. In the post-colonial and dependent countries, globalization led to the emergence of new factors that contributed economic and social solutions that had been previously unknown or known only in very few cases. Aware of all the negative elements of the colonial system, we should above all stress that elements of modern development were nevertheless brought in only or mainly by colonial powers. However, the breakup of the system was followed by the emergence of new channels for the inflow of modern solutions. When sovereignty or quasi-sovereignty was gained, new and strong powers took an ever-growing interest in the former colonies for reasons that included their resources and a desire to relocate certain branches of industry that were no longer consistent with a vision of the modern state in the emerging new stage of civilization. The dissemination of a knowledge-based society does not mean that it is possible to opt out of industrial production, and the former colonies are not only potential markets but also huge sources of low-cost labor. Developed countries are increasingly reliant on services, and some industries, especially the dirty or labor-intensive ones, in particular in terms of low-cost labor, are being relocated to such countries.

This process entails two types of consequences. On the one hand, it results in a model of development that is imitative and peripheral, if not as a whole then at least in terms of numerous characteristics and properties. On the other hand, it increases corruption and by the same token what are already enormous income differentials. Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is characterized by countries with the widest income differentials. If we use the Gini coefficient (discussed above) to measure this type of inequality, these countries include South Africa, Zambia, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Angola. However, this does not mean that other countries are characterized by low income inequality. Nevertheless, some of them

have made visible progress, which manifests itself in the emergence of a rather large group formed by the middle class.

If we wanted to present the problem of this group of countries in the most general way, we could say that they are being increasingly included into certain segments of the world's market, in a way that is nonetheless dominated by its negative characteristics.

Warfare and terrorism. The relatively persistent phenomena that have occurred over the past several decades include terrorism, which is present on almost all continents, and various minor and major wars, chiefly in Africa, Middle America, South America, and Asia. What is the main reason behind these highly negative phenomena? Answering this question is not easy, despite the fact that these phenomena have certainly occurred also in the past, albeit not on such a scale and not over such a long timeframe. When attempting to answer this question here, we on the one hand rely on certain real phenomena or even processes and on the other one present a certain theoretical hypothesis.

We propose to view this issue in terms of a certain three-way configuration of processes that have taken place in the international arena for nearly a half-century now, despite varying in intensity across continents. The first of these processes is the emergence of sovereign states, both ones that had existed in the past yet their sovereignty was disrupted for various reasons that ones that had not previously existed. Secondly, there is the growing clash of different cultural systems that is very likely to generate conflicts. Although these diversified cultural systems also existed in the past, they had certain limitations that made it more difficult for their conflict-prone nature to manifest itself in full. The modern era has largely attenuated these limitations, thus offering different aspects of this conflict-prone nature an opportunity to manifest themselves more fully. The factors that eliminated those limitations were the full or quasi-full sovereignty of newly-formed countries and numerous threats, including new ones. The third and probably the most important process comprises transitions from one stage of civilization to another, which gradually change the world and, more importantly, influence the new balance of political, economic, and social power. New centers for intellectual and technological thought are emerging. Consequently, we can observe a new configuration of centers of authority and the possibilities of influencing development, not only on specific continents but on the worldwide scale.

Each of these segments sets into motion different destructive forces that differ in terms of not only their reach but also their consequences. Without going into detail, we should point out certain characteristic consequences of each process within this three-way configuration, but we should also observe that the interrelations that exist between them are quite consistent and more importantly very strong.

Let us now analyze these processes in more detail, focusing in particular on the consequences that they entail.

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

The emergence of new states. New states that emerged were highly diversified, depending on how they gained sovereignty and when, on the borders within which they were formed, and on such factors as their ethnic structure, level of development, and dominant political and ideological thought. In order to simplify our analysis, we will attempt to divide them into certain groups.

The largest group is formed by post-colonial states. It is extremely diversified from every point of view. Most of these countries gained their sovereignty as a result of external decisions made by colonial powers. This holds true in particular for African countries, partially also for Asian states. The second group is formed by countries that gained their sovereignty in the course of armed conflicts, for example the countries that emerged in the aftermath of the war in Indochina or in what was formerly known as Yugoslavia. The third important group comprises post-socialist countries that gained sovereignty through democratic revolutions (internal “regime changes”), but their territorial borders, regardless of the period in which we consider them, continue to generate conflicts until the present day in light of both their reduced territories and numerous tensions – often caused by the fact that a certain and sometimes quite large group of ethnic group members remained in territories that ended up outside the borders of countries where the main body of that group resides.

One important consequence of this new territorial configuration is the appearance of nationalist ideology. Even if it was not always a dominant form, it most probably had an important impact on social awareness and emotions as well as the possibilities of their practical use in state politics. Such processes could be generally described in the following way: nationalism was one of the most important factors that influenced social cohesion and identity in most of the sovereign states that have emerged over the past half-century (which does not mean that this ideology no longer holds appeal in old countries, at least to certain social groups).

That said, these problems pertain not only to newly-formed states or the states that have gained full sovereignty but also to a certain extent to former colonial powers as well as Russia, understood as a distinctive kind of colonial power, albeit in a different social system. Nostalgia for former glory triggers negative ideologies, which exist alongside traditional nationalism. Despite the existence of various international institutions, the ideas of assistance, support, and tolerance are quite rare, even marginal. However, one notable exception here is the EU, especially for the less developed among its members, in particular the post-socialist countries.

Differences between cultural systems. Although divergent cultural systems are by no means a new phenomenon, the configuration of states that has emerged over the past half-century or century has caused their cultural systems to undergo certain rather negative changes. Huge movements of people, related not only to the emergence of new countries but also to a search for the best possible

locations for leading relatively decent lives, have resulted in the intermixing of cultural systems. Although the Euro-Atlantic countries have a long tradition of multiculturalism, the coexistence of groups that represent different cultural systems is far from satisfactory.

This situation is particularly visible in Europe, where it has been caused by two processes. One was and partially still remains related to the fact that the former colonial powers opened up their borders to a certain subset of the inhabitants of their former colonies. The other is a result of regime changes in the former countries of Central and Eastern Europe, combined with a somewhat earlier inflow of Turkish and Yugoslavian nationals to certain Western countries, especially Germany. Initially, this process was relatively peaceful and accepted by the ethnic inhabitants of the old European countries. However, when migrations of foreigners intensified, including from other areas as a result of a variety of reasons that had their roots in the more and less distant past, this led to the escalation of a growing number of new conflicts. More importantly, various animosities appeared that had their roots in the more distant or less distant past, as did a new type of conflicts. These resulted from tradition, history, and religion, and were additionally compounded by the crisis of 2008 and its consequences. Another particularly powerful factor comprises the consequences of transitions from one stage of civilization to another, which will be presented below. The manifestations of such transitions included terrorism and the invasion of refugees in Europe as a result of the degradation of new post-colonial states.

Transitions from one stage of civilization to another. Without engaging in the well-known dispute over the definition of the word “civilization” between theorists and scholars, we will adopt the following definition here: a civilization is characterized by a specific level of material culture, a level of control over the natural environment, and the presence of certain social institutions. We can list four characteristic features of this approach:

1. A decisive role is played by fundamental resources for production and the nature of labor, as well as by the mental system characteristic of this type of activity.
2. Each civilization is characterized by a specific model of the state, which is influenced to a significant degree by a specific cultural system.
3. Every civilization is characterized by the presence of a system of economic and social links.
4. A new stage of civilization arrives during the previous stage or stages, and the economic and cultural conditions of this period have a significant impact on the shape of the new civilization, especially in initial phases.

Without presenting a detailed analysis of the problems brought by a new stage of civilization, we should point out several important characteristics of modern-day transitions from one stage of civilization to another. The first and most probably the most important such characteristic is the considerable broadening

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

of the centers (the number of countries) that had an overwhelming influence over the emergence of the knowledge-based civilization (or “information society”). We only have very basic elements of this at present; as for its consequences, we can only project them.

If the onset of the industrial civilization was a product of several countries of Western Europe and, more importantly, was promoted chiefly by economic and political entities from Western Europe, the beginnings of the knowledge-based civilization can be linked chiefly to the United States and Europe, and partially also to certain Asian countries.

Another important characteristic of the knowledge-based civilization is the shift in basic forms of business activity, from industry to the service sector. However, this does not mean that industrial production is no longer as important as it was in the past. Here, we can talk of two types of changes. First, we can observe the emergence of new and innovative branches of industry, which are stimulated by the information revolution and alter the labor market by introducing robotic automation in many spheres. Secondly, some sectors of industry, as mentioned earlier, are exported in the form of foreign investments by business organizations to less developed countries.

The third characteristic of the modern-day knowledge-based civilization, its development and roots, is particularly important from the perspective of these considerations. The question of “Where is Europe headed?” is particularly important in the context of civilizational turning points, or transitions from one stage of civilization to another. During the onset and development of the industrial stage of civilization, Europe had no powerful rivals for at least two centuries. The United States assumed this role in the period between World War I and II, and it was not until after World War II that it started to dominate the area of modern technology. Today, there are a lot more such rivals in the dissemination of the knowledge-based civilization, ones that come from Asia at that – not only developed countries such as Japan, but also those that aspire to this status, ranging from South Korea to China. Perhaps we should also take into account North Korea here, at least from the military perspective. However, listing Europe’s potential rivals does carry too much significance for our considerations.

One thing is certain: Europe is no longer the only or the main center of technological and social thought.

It did at some point seem that the European Union would become such a center of knowledge-based thought and practice. Despite significant progress that has been made in this respect, however, the advancement of individual interests by some of the EU member states consciously and sometimes unconsciously poses barriers to rapid progress in science and technology as well as intellectual progress, not to mention the issue of their becoming closed off to people who are ethnically and culturally foreign.

3. The demographic boom and its consequences

The most important challenges facing today's world undoubtedly include booming population numbers. According to one forecast, the world's population, which stood at nearly 7.350 billion inhabitants in 2015, is expected to rise to 8.500 billion 2030 and 9.725 billion in 2050. The fastest growth is expected to be recorded in Africa, which was inhabited by 1.186 billion people in 2015, and this number is expected to grow to 2.478 in 2050. Asia's population stood at 4.393 billion in 2015 and is expected to rise to 5.267 billion in 2050. In the same time-frame, Europe's population, which stood at 0.738 billion 2015, is expected to shrink to 0.707 billion in 2050. Here, we may add that each consecutive forecast provides for a greater drop in Europe's population. More importantly, these forecasts are accompanied by growth in average life expectancy, which in practice also means population aging, but this process will not be distributed uniformly across individual European countries.

Europe, as shown by demographic forecasts, is the only continent that may face a decline in its ethnic population. More importantly, Europe's population will be aging at the fastest rate. The share of the retirement-age population in the total population will rise from 24% in 2015 to 34% in 2050, which will create a problem with labor supply. It remains unclear how this problem will be resolved. Numerous real threats have appeared, and these include also more emotional and xenophobic threats.

Regardless of the European problem, to which we will return later, there are also numerous other challenges and threats that are important not only for Europe but also for the world.

The first of these is related to the unprecedented growth in population numbers. Africa's population is projected to double in the period between 2015 and 2050. Population growth in Asia is smaller, but it will be nonetheless very significant. Such a change causes very rapid growth not only in production and employment but also – and on a previously unknown scale – in the development of both the hard and the soft infrastructure, construction for residential purposes, urban agglomerations, and above all jobs. The fundamental question is, is that possible? If we consider continents comprehensively, the answer is: “no.” Individual countries, in particular in Asia, may develop more or less rational solutions to this problem, but a comprehensive solution at the level of entire continents is rather unlikely.

Another challenge, and a result of the first challenge, is posed by the consequences of the attempts to resolve the problem. Three of them appear particularly likely, but they will most probably affect different continents to different extents.

The first of these consequences involves mass migrations and attempts thereof. This is a phenomenon have observed for a number of years: people migrating chiefly from Africa to Europe, for reasons that include certain proximity,

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

the theoretical ease of access, and a vision of welfare in Europe. Reasons for the exodus of refugees vary, but they chiefly include destruction, numerous countries' inability to function, and famine on the one hand and armed conflicts on the other. These are not just ongoing, temporary reasons, but it is nonetheless difficult to forecast how long it may take to overcome these problems. Here is where we reach the issue of long-term prospects. Local solutions to resolve these problems would involve fast political stabilization and strong economic expansion. However, such a prospect is very unlikely for a vast majority of African countries. Hence, we should also take into account a persistent exodus of people, most probably to Europe. Sooner or later, European countries will realize that these refugees may alleviate the shortages in the labor market caused by a limited supply of labor. Whether all countries will be able to accept such solutions is another matter, one to which we will return later.

The second consequence is the permanent nature of conflict. This pertains to both armed conflicts on various scales and conflicts influenced by cultural differences. They result from territorial divisions that are consequences of former colonial boundaries. Unification or secession attempts among new countries are a long and difficult process. Hence, we can assume that these conflicts will not be extinguished any time soon, and it will be difficult to hope for permanent, substantial, and selfless assistance on the part of developed countries. We could even hazard the hypothesis that the inflow of foreign investments will only perpetuate these divisions, because then it is easier to take advantage of the resources available in these countries. In turn, the absence of sufficiently large and efficient elites in the domestic arena will hinder the real consolidation of most of the countries. Differences in cultural systems will also ignite persistent conflicts.

The third segment comprises the socioeconomic consequences of the demographic boom. A very fast rise in population numbers, especially on poorly-developed continents, will entail famine on a great scale, a situation that we can already observe. The problem is complicated for two reasons. On the one hand, from the perspective of science, the world food demand can currently be satisfied for an estimated 8-9 billion inhabitants on the condition of rational and modern exploitation of land. All this assumes solidarity on the part of the developed world in the form of the flow of capital, the accumulation of experience, and help from experts. Here, a problem arises: is the developed part of the world ready, or will it be ready, to engage in this grand project? Experience make us doubt that, and the coming decades are rather unlikely to bring a change of mentality among the ruling and business elite alone, not to mention certain societies. This hypothesis may be overly pessimistic from the perspective of the character traits of affluent and developed societies. The threat of permanent warfare and a persistent invasion of refugees may change current attitudes to this dramatic problem, which essentially affects mainly Europe.

Will we witness any fundamental change in this respect?

4. Negative consequences of civilizational transitions

Transitions from one stage of civilization to another are a certain universal rule of development. Phenomena involved in this process are numerous, and so are their consequences. We may say in general that each consecutive civilization in the socioeconomic sense creates better conditions for human existence. How this general statement translates into practice, however, varies in time and across space, and above all depending on various societies, in particular individual groups in these societies.

The industrial civilization transformed the world to a fundamental extent, as compared to the agrarian civilization. However, the experience of industrial civilization, spread over nearly three centuries, proves that it has only been implemented in full in certain countries or societies of the world. In some countries or regions of the world, it has altered the conditions of labor, lifestyles, and standards of living in a comprehensive way and simultaneously introduced numerous divisions, chiefly under the influence of income differentials and social inequalities. Consequently, this manifested itself in numerous conflicts both within and between specific countries. More importantly, a majority of the world's population experienced the positive consequences of industrial civilization only superficially, because they lived and developed chiefly in the agrarian stage of civilization.

The beginnings of information society, or strictly speaking the knowledge-based civilization, can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, but its first signs appeared even earlier. Its expansion took place in the second half of the twentieth century, and equally importantly, was linked to the degradation of not only the industrial civilization but also and the agrarian civilization on a large scale.

The emergence of a new stage of civilization brings about not only positive consequences but also negative process that change the nature and conditions of the existence of societies. At this point, we do not want to list all of the consequences of this process, but we feel we should nonetheless present some of them. The order in which they will be listed here is not meant to denote their importance, because they vary in impact depending on the type of country, the level of socioeconomic development, as well as political differences and differences in dominant cultural systems.

1. The knowledge-based civilization is characterized by the presence of fundamental economic resources in the form of services, unlike the industrial civilization, where this role was played by industry. Without going into great detail, we should above all point to changes in the nature of the labor market, especially the emergence of the "*precarial*" as a new social class.

2. The information revolution has made numerous beneficial contributions to social development. Nevertheless, we should point out certain two important negative aspects, namely the possibility of practically full surveillance of society

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

and the dissemination of various forms of post-truth. Both forms are fraught with numerous potential consequences, which are not only political but also economic and social.

3. By initiating processes related to globalization and the information revolution, the new stage of civilization leads to the degradation of the model of the state that originated in the industrial stage of civilization and functioned in practically all modern-day societies. There has been, as yet, no good substitute of the existing model of the state.

4. Civilizational turning points have resulted in the dissemination of various political models not only among societies from the agrarian civilization but also in developed countries, influenced by the industrial civilization. Such models vary from liberal democracies through non-liberal democracies and autocracies all the way to dictatorships.

5. While World War II was followed by different armed conflicts or even wars, the modern period is characterized by their intensification. Practically no continent is free from them, despite the fact that these conflicts vary in their scope.

6. What deserves special attention, however, is the onset or even ever-wider dissemination of religious warfare. Although there were religious wars of different reach at the threshold of the industrial stage of civilization, with the Thirty Years' War being a commonly known conflict, it appears that in today's world the same dimensions have been assumed by the war in Islam, between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as between Islam and Christianity.

7. Finally, we should point to forecasts, in particular American ones, that point to the United States, China, and Russia as the main players in the world's arena in the foreseeable future. Here, two solutions are possible. Either there will be an armed conflict or a consensus will be reached in the sphere of relatively normal international trade. Europe will be embroiled in either scenario, and the consequences will depend on which solution is adopted: trade or an armed conflict.

5. Destruction of the environment and climate warming

This is a problem that is discussed and described extensively, but there is, as yet, not enough effective action. The dangers posed by climate warming, burgeoning smog in cities, and the degradation of the environment are growing at an accelerated pace. Without performing a detailed analysis of this problem, which poses a global threat, we can only explain it by saying that the fact most members of the ruling elite treat it maybe not as a marginally important question but as a long-term issue that conflicts with ongoing politics to a substantial extent. Understanding of sustainable growth is still very poor, among both the intellectual elite and the ruling elite, let alone members of the public. There is no general education in the sphere of threats posed by the destruction of the environment and

climate warming. Nevertheless, this is one of the threats that can only be mitigated in a long timeframe. Secondly, this requires considerable financial resources to be allotted to both practical measures and research into the diversified nature of the solutions to specific problems in various regions of the world. Thirdly, public approval of environmental protection needed as a priority in government measures not only in individual countries or on individual continents but also on a global scale. This is because these threats are very strongly interlinked in this respect, and it is impossible to counter them without extensive international collaboration.

A brief commentary on the margin of the analysis of the world around Europe.

Irrespective of how we evaluate Europe's strengths and weaknesses, which will be presented further in this analysis, the situation in the world around Europe is not very favorable for Europe or strictly speaking for its further development, and more importantly for efforts to overcome existing weaknesses and threats, and this will not change in the coming decades. For the time being, the main problem is posed by the fact that the Europeans are not fully aware of the consequences of the changes that have taken place in the world over the past half-century.

In this context, we could hypothesize that Europe no longer sets the direction or directions of development for the world's economy, society, education, and technological innovation. More importantly, the directions of expansion in various spheres of social activity are becoming increasingly diversified.