

Chapter V

CHALLENGES FACING EUROPE

The task of positing possible scenarios for Europe's future is extremely complex. This is partly because, by their very nature, such scenarios must be qualitative, meaning they must include certain components that take into account a wide range of different areas of social activity, from political and security issues, through changes in the social structure to economic processes, not only related to growth, but also resulting from turning points of civilization. It is just as important to take into account everything that is happening in Europe's environs, which in terms of complex globalization processes means that the entire non-European world has a definite impact on what will happen in Europe in the future. The preliminary tenets upon which these scenarios are based will be presented as the typical strengths and weaknesses of modern-day Europe. Merely presenting the conditions in which Europe will be developing does not necessarily clarify whether or not this development will be beneficial to Europeans. The difficulty of devising these developmental scenarios stems both from the diversity of the individual countries, as well as the different ambitions and visions of their governing powers, which will have a profound impact on the kinds of tasks societies will have to face. We should remember that Europe is not a collection of single-minded nations with common, much less identical goals. This also applies to the European Union, although there one can find certain shared tasks and interests.

The strengths and weaknesses examined here do have their opposite sides, however. What may be seen as an asset in a short or medium-term, in the long run may turn out to be a serious problem hindering growth. Likewise, certain apparent weaknesses may, in certain circumstances, turn out to propel development.

As such, before positing developmental scenarios, we will start with a presentation and some general commentary on the challenges facing Europe. There is a fairly strong connection between these challenges and the strengths and weaknesses that in essence determine the policy of the European elites. Combining both these aspects will allow us to create potential scenarios for European growth.

Europe is an internally diverse continent, and its countries are dependent on one another, but are also subject to strong external influences. Although these influences have always been there, modern times have brought new and numerous changes to this process that are not always positive. They are mainly related to globalization and the emergence of the global market, as well as new forms of

communication brought on by the information revolution. Thus, the challenges facing Europe should be looked at much more broadly than they have been in the past.

The challenges faced by European countries and societies can be divided into four basic groups.

1. Internal challenges
2. Global challenges
3. Challenges related to the division of the non-European world
4. Impact of countries in Europe's environs on Europe.

We will now examine each of these basic groups in greater detail.

1. Challenges stemming from sources within Europe

1.1. Challenges related to the European nature

- a) Europe is a collection of 50-odd countries, each with its own diverse history, economic and population potential, degrees of sustainability and continuity, cultural systems, etc. This largely determines the nature and structure of each country, its development possibilities, and especially interstate relations.
- b) The diverse nature of each country also determines the potential for conflict between them. This potential depends on several basic factors, such as the country's history – often marked by numerous and bloody wars and territorial changes, lack of continuity, and succumbing to the influence of such cultural aspects as tradition and religion (especially when it comes to economic and social development, including social diversity, and above all income differentials).
- c) The diverse nature of countries has always had an overwhelming influence on their political model: from liberal-democratic, through non-liberal, authoritarian, to dictatorial. It is these political models that have shaped various ideologies, ranging from liberal, through nationalistic, populist, neo-fascist, and even eco-protectionist ideologies. Transitions from one stage of civilization to another gave rise to these processes on a large scale, allowing them to emerge as a result of the ever-growing diversification of individual countries.
- d) Another significant problem has always been the issue of multiculturalism, which has been present in most European countries since the dawn of time, but in the last hundred years has grown into one of the top conflict-generating problems. This is an issue dealt with, albeit to a different degree, by all modern states.
- e) The universality of the market economy, especially after the collapse of socialism, has become a factor that has strongly bonded European countries in recent decades, but the negative effects of the market are also the source of numerous conflicts, both for individual countries and for Europe as a whole.

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Generalizing the above remarks, one can come to the conclusion that Europe will be unable to face these challenges, at least in the coming decades, although this does not mean that some of them will not be alleviated. It may be possible for some, if not all countries. Europe is divided enough that some countries attempt to take varying approaches to solving certain challenges, often against the interests of other countries.

1.2. Europe divided

Although we can consider and analyze the problems of Europe as a continent with its own history, we must first and foremost remember that Europe has always been divided, and that most certainly remains the case today. These divisions, of various degrees of significance, are myriad. Here we will discuss those that we believe are key to the continent's further development.

The most important dividing line today is the one that separates the countries of the European Union from the rest of Europe. This is a somewhat fluid division, as countries can leave the European Union, like the United Kingdom has resolved to, but other countries can also still join it, which may happen in the coming years. There are some countries, however, that have no interest in joining the European Union, -- these include Russia together with several of its neighbors that form the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as Turkey, which is seemingly aspiring to become a sort of new Ottoman Empire and is more concerned with expanding towards the Middle East rather than Europe.

The second dividing line, however, runs through the European Union itself: countries with the euro as their currency as opposed to those outside the euro zone. Theoretically, all EU member states have the option of joining the euro zone after meeting certain conditions and that is indeed a long-term goal. For individual countries, this means complying with the rules in force in the euro zone, such as giving up certain governing freedoms incumbent upon having a separate currency, adopting the common monetary policy to a certain extent, and de facto consenting to further, more in-depth forms of integration still in the pipeline, such as having a common budget, common tax policy, etc. No one knows how the process of expanding the euro zone will continue, as it is technically a voluntary decision of each state, despite many of the new states having committed to do so in their accession treaties. The fact that some countries are dead set against joining the euro zone today does not mean that they will not change their minds in the future.

This next division, which has to some extent always existed, stems from the varied cultural systems in individual countries. It has its roots in a reluctance to accept multiculturalism, which has a long history in some countries. To what extent and how long before this reluctance is significantly reduced depends to a large extent on there being documented evidence of successful assimilation of foreigners, as well as on the effectiveness of the methods used to control their flow across the borders into the European Union. This is strongly linked with the

effectiveness of EU assistance given to poor societies in their places of residence. It is impossible at this point to predict what the future will hold in this case.

The next division, maybe even more important than many of us may think, concerns the differences and tensions between the European Union and Russia. The problem is not just that Russia does not want to be part of an integrated Europe. Rather, it has ambitions to become the dominant player or power on the entire European continent. Its actions are often hostile to some European countries, beginning with the annexation of Crimea, unleashing the war in Donbas, interfering with the functioning of other countries, especially during parliamentary elections, and creating numerous pro-Russian lobbies, to name a few. Unfortunately, there are many signs that in the coming decades Europe will not become an oasis of peace and untroubled growth.

2. Global challenges faced by Europe

Over the last half-century, the world has changed fundamentally, and there are many reasons for this. These changes have had a very diverse impact on Europe, often different than in other parts of the world. This is mainly due to the fact that today, unlike in the past, change is happening simultaneously in different parts of the world but on a very diverse scale. The discussion below will present these changes somewhat selectively, in no particular order of importance, due to their different natures and how they affect individual regions of the world.

2.1. Challenges related to turning points of civilization

1. These days we are dealing with two types of civilizational transitions. Those of the first kind have been brought on by industrial civilization and occur mainly in well-developed countries, while the other, which can be referred to as the destruction of agrarian civilization, occurs in the least-developed countries, home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population. What we should expect to see in the coming decades is some mixed form of civilization involving significant diversification, as mentioned earlier, dictated by differing degrees of civilizational and economic advancement, in some places influenced by colonialism or the socialist experiment.

In this context, we should stress that the pace of the rise of both the industrial and information-society stages of civilization will depend on two processes. Firstly, that pace will be influenced by transnational corporations that invest in the existing resources of individual countries, sometimes even relocating entire branches of the so-called dirty industries. Secondly, it can be accelerated by ingenuity, activity or innovation among the local population. Various hybrid models of civilization will be shaped by the economic entities that will (and partly already are) dynamically stimulating the market economy, and by the equally rapid devel-

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opment of various forms of communication, as well as the wealth of knowledge brought on by the information-society stage of civilization. We must add, however, that although certain countries will experience this accelerated economic development, that does not mean they will be any less dependent politically or economically on transnational corporations.

2. Civilizational transitions are a threat to societal life. These threats have already been discussed, but need additional explanation.

The emergence of a new stage of civilization is not a one-off process, but happens gradually, although each subsequent phase occurs at its own pace. Creating a new stage of civilization involves destroying the old one. This is evident on all levels, including in the structure of society, where new social groups or even classes appear. Most importantly, the virtual economy will contribute to the emergence of a new strong and influential financial circle, governing financial markets. A *precarariat* class will form among hired workers. The economy will see a rise in the importance of services, gradually replacing industrialism with new tools that will lead to changes in industry itself. Industry will be flooded with new tools and innovations of digital civilization, which in turn will lead to the emergence of new professions unknown in the past. Significant changes will take place on the labor market, leading to changes and posing new challenges to the education system, which drives development. Economic changes will force universities and research centers to alter the nature of their activity, presenting and proposing a new vision of the world and new ways of connecting with each other.

The world has never been as closely interconnected as it is today. Not only because of the universal market economy or new means of communication, but also due to the flow and movement of people. The main question in this regard concerns the effects of this transitional period. At this point it is difficult to determine how long it will last, and to what extent these interconnections will contribute to reducing or increasing global diversity. These days we can only have a general idea of how this new civilization will look, so there are only two possible answers to this question, with the first applying to the nearest decades, and the second reaching a little further in the future. In the nearest future we may see increasing differences between countries, due to individual societies having various abilities to adapt to change. In this respect, the past largely determines not only the present, but also the nearest future. Beyond that, the future is difficult to predict because we do not know to what extent development will proceed as expected, and what processes, if any, will influence changes to this expected path.

3. This leads us to focus on the closest period and its possible consequences. In general, we can point to four major processes related to civilizational transitions.

The first, most general process refers to the intensification of already existing threats, both related to old stages of civilization, as well as the newly emerging one. This includes the destruction of existing institutional and legal processes that

have proven to be ineffective, such as the traditional state model, which in many cases is unable to perform all its functions, both internal and external. This especially includes those traditional model functions of developing countries during the industrial civilization. It was caused by the emergence of numerous international institutions imposing new rules on countries that were previously sovereign states.

The second process relates to increasing immigration and movement of populations, caused by the destruction of the existing institutionalization of the state and the economic model, as well as by numerous armed conflicts, territorial changes, and difficult living conditions.

The third process stems from cultural system clashes, which lead to numerous ethnic and religious conflicts. These conflicts have always existed, but we have never experienced them on today's scale, and they will surely increase as the human population grows and modern forms of communication, including visual communication, continue to expand.

The fourth process is probably the most dramatic, lasting the longest and hardest to overcome, if it ever happens. It has to do with the natural environment, both in terms of sufficient resources and growing energy problems, and of course, the increasing destruction of our natural environment, global warming, and deteriorating quality of life for the growing world population. Many experts claim that in terms of harnessing natural resources, the policies of certain countries, as well as certain large economic players, are causing the gradual environmental devastation of our planet.

All these are problems on a global scale, and Europe is certainly not immune to them. One may go so far as to say that Europe, as the most developed part of the world, may feel the effects of this process the most, although they may not necessarily be the most dramatic. At this point in time, the joint effects of all these threats are not yet clearly visible, and many political elites do not consider them significant enough, treating them as secondary or even lesser threats. This does not bode well for Europe in the long run.

2.2. The global demographic boom

1. One of the most serious problems that the world must face in the coming decades is the mounting demographic boom. The acceleration of population growth has continued for several decades, although not in all parts of the world. Without going into historical analysis, we should take a look at the processes that have already been launched in this area and what is expected to happen through the end of the century.

There are 7.5 billion people living in the world today. This number is expected to rise to nearly 10 billion by 2050, and to 11 billion by 2100 (forecasts range between 11.2 billion and 11.5 billion inhabitants), of course barring any global cataclysm. What does this population growth mean? Without going into detail,

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it presents numerous challenges. First of all, it will be difficult to feed that many people. Agricultural experts who study how to boost the global food supply claim that the global ecosystem is able to feed about 10-11 billion people relatively easily, but it will require huge capital expenditures. The world does have enough financial resources, but it lacks the necessary solidarity, while significant income disparities around the world pose another obstacle. At this point it is difficult to predict the structure of this global population. Currently, developed economies have about 15-17% of the total population, while the highest population growth is being observed in third-world areas, such as Africa. Food supply is not the only problem. Equally important issues include lack of proper education, insufficient infrastructure and chaotic urbanization. Forecasts anticipate that population growth will be the lowest in the most developed countries, even negative in the case of the ethnically European populations. We will come back to this issue in a later section.

2. Multiculturalism is another problem in this area. Although we have been dealing with multiculturalism and its problems practically since the dawn of humanity, the problem became exacerbated with the spread of industrial civilization, becoming a serious contemporary issue following two civilizational transitions. The problems of multiculturalism are not just related to one's place of birth; it is more important what cultural system one belongs to. Religion and tradition, as well as history and language, are key here. Cultural differences are often used in the contemporary policies of both developed and developing countries.

Conflicts resulting from different cultural systems manifest themselves in a plethora of ways, ranging from armed conflicts to various forms of discrimination (both institutional and individual-collective). They may be due to race, religion, tradition, inability to cooperate, the excess inflow of a certain type of population, difficulty in acclimatizing, fear of competition on the labor market and for many more reasons, but perhaps above all, because of the policies of certain governments.

These issues appear in both economically developed and developing countries. Discrimination and lack of tolerance are observed nearly everywhere. There is no quick solution to this problem, which has been going on for centuries, and will probably go on for some time. This is due to the fact that cultural systems do not easily adapt to change.

3. One of the greatest global conflicts and problems is the enormous income disparity on many different levels, including the inter-continental level, the intra-continental level, and the inter-national level, both on a global and continental scale. The final, lowest level involves disparities within individual countries and regions. There is no easy way to measure these disparities. On this massive scale we usually use the country's GDP per capita, which, as we know, is not a reliable enough measure, despite it being widely used. At most, it shows the average level of disparity in a given country. Of course, more detailed analysis of income dis-

parities is possible, especially in individual countries, or in terms of the general distribution of income on a global scale. But when it comes to the income level of societies, and above all individuals and families, the magnitude of wealth accumulated in the past is key, often not taken into account in the comparisons done today. Once accumulated, assets have a tendency to continually grow – a norm imposed by the industrial stage of civilization. According to recent research, in 2010, the total wealth of the poorest half of the world population was equivalent to the wealth of the 400 richest people in the world. By 2014 that number had dwindled to 86 richest people, and dropped even further to only the 8 richest people by 2016.

These days we should firstly take into account the pace of increasing diversification, which is significant during civilizational transitions. More importantly, it often changes very rapidly, especially in those countries that have not experienced these kinds of transformations. The geography of growth has also changed in recent decades. The areas that experienced this growth during the industrial revolution, which paved the way for a new civilization back in the 1990s, have now stepped aside and made way for Asian countries, such as China, India and Pakistan.

Let's take a closer look at Europe's diversification, not only in terms of income, but also from an institutional point of view. This especially concerns the European Union, which has focused on reducing inequalities between its member states. Let's take GDP per capita as our starting point. If we use 100 to represent the EU's average GDP in 2015, Luxemburg, at 269, was the most developed country, while Bulgaria, with 47, was the least developed. What's important, however, was that there were 17 countries below the EU average. In recent years, this ratio has slightly decreased, but there are still more countries with a GDP below the EU average. Also, countries outside the European Union have a lower GDP than the EU average. Another very important indicator is the Gini index, in terms of which the EU scored an average of 31.0 in 2015. Iceland ranked the lowest at 23.6, while Lithuania ranked highest at 37.9. In this case, the European Union still differs significantly from the European countries that are not part of the EU, where the index exceeds 40. It is evident, therefore, that income disparities in Europe are significant and, more importantly, strongly visible. We should note, however, that they are even greater on other continents.

In the context of income disparities, we should also look at systemic differences when it comes to basic values professed mainly in Europe and, historically speaking, in other European cultures, but also on other continents. There are two main concepts in this respect: democracy and economic freedom. Let us look at each of these concepts from the perspective of how European countries rank.

The democracy index includes 5 categories: electoral processes and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. The analysis covers 40 European countries in 2016. The first group

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includes 17 countries ranked as fully democratic. The second group consists of countries with defective democracy, of which there are 19. The third group includes 5 countries with a hybrid system, and the last group has two countries ranked as having an authoritarian regime.

In terms of economic freedom, which is important given the prevailing market economy and global market system, we can distinguish four groups of European countries. The first group is made up of 13 countries with predominant economic freedom, including all large and economically significant states, with the exception of Spain and Russia, as well as four post-socialist countries. The second group consists of 13 countries with moderate freedom, including Poland. The third group includes countries where lack of freedom predominates, including Russia and Greece. Belarus and Ukraine, where repression dominates, make up the fourth and final group.

Generally speaking, the different types of disparities, including those relating to cultural systems, create a particularly strong mixture that hinders cooperation opportunities, and thus also effective development. They lead to all kinds of problems, including armed conflicts, both in Europe and on a global scale.

4. As the issue of income disparities and the resulting consequences have been focused upon, not enough attention has been paid to the socio-political effects, which are of particular importance to the evolving information-based stage of civilization (information society). Knowledge about other countries and their development has become not only commonplace, but also visible. It turns out that, from the point of view of economic growth and expansion potential, it is not just the liberal-democratic models that are effective, having in the past guaranteed increased wealth in countries belonging to the European cultural circle. Although this wealth did not increase in every country on equal terms, contemporary times have shown us that economic success can also be achieved in systems that are far from democratic. The success of the Chinese economy is one example. Over a period of 70 years (1830-1900), Great Britain increased its GDP fourfold, whereas China managed to increase its GDP 32-fold in just 32 years. Although the income disparity in China, according to the Gini index, continues to be one of the highest in the world at approx. 0.50, the country's rate of economic growth may be seen as a model worth emulating by many political elites from other geographic and cultural circles. In some situations, this may lead some governments, including in developed countries, to switch to authoritarian political models, including in Europe (Russia, Turkey), not excluding the European Union.

5. The most serious long-term global threats today include: excessively rapid devastation of the natural environment, rapidly growing global warming, and the plundering of natural resources, etc. This is not a new issue, as it has always existed, but present times have brought additional and, more importantly,

dangerous threats that form an unprecedented triad. The first and probably the most important aspect is the great demographic boom, as previously mentioned. It leads to problems in many areas, the most important of which is the rapidly growing demand for food. Hunger has become a fairly common phenomenon, not only in poor, undeveloped countries, but also in developed and prosperous economies. The second is the projected image of the world in which people can clearly see that there are, in fact, two distinctly different worlds: one wealthy, drowning in luxury and constantly growing richer, and the other poor. The problem with this image is that the poor now have the same aspirations as the rich, with the former not being able to fulfill their expectations. It creates tensions, frustration and radical, not always rational, attempts to change one's situation. The third is the neo-liberal market, which ensures quick wealth in a short time span. Never in the past has this disparity grown as quickly as nowadays.

It is difficult, then, to not assume that if this continues it may lead to profound devastation of the ecosystem. Many environmental scientists and practitioners have been trying to get the world's attention for decades, warning about this threat of destruction. The positive responses to this so far are still not enough to prevent these events from happening. The day-to-day concerns of individuals, larger social groups, as well as many countries, still take precedence over social disasters that are far off into the future. Although there are initiatives to try and combat these issues, they have not yet secured enough support from political and business elites.

6. There is one more important threat we have been observing for some time now, a phenomenon that preceded the emergence of industrial civilization. Although it goes by various names, it has a common denominator: namely, religious war. The civilizational transitions of the last decades have awakened the Islamic community, which during the last stage of civilization was pushed to the margins of world society, but the destruction of countries in the Middle East, Africa, and partly in Asia has triggered the self-awareness of many followers of Islam. Without going into a detailed analysis, we can point out a few main aspects of this phenomenon. The first and probably the most important one involves the hostility and conflicts, including armed, between the two main currents in Islam, Sunnis and Shiites. This has resulted in the creation and operation of the Islamic State (ISIS). The second is various forms of terrorism, with the jihadist movement and al-Qaida leading the way. The third is the phenomenon of the rest of the world becoming infected with an aversion or hostility towards foreigners, mainly with religious, racial and political differences.

The consequences of this are difficult to predict. Perhaps they will lessen in the coming years, or it may gain momentum and continue for years to come, as was once the case with religious warfare in Europe.

3. Division of the world outside Europe

1. The links that have evolved over the last two or three decades have made relations between countries, as well as entire continents, much closer than in the past. This is due to two mutually dependent processes: globalization and civilizational transitions, especially the transformation from industrial civilization to the knowledge-based civilization (information society).

Dividing up the non-European world is not easy, mainly because such a division cannot be systemic nor continental. In the past, sometime in the middle of the twentieth century, perceiving such a division was relatively simple. The world was divided into three subsystems: capitalist developed countries, economies with socialist systems, and Third World countries. These days, although the world can still be divided into three different subsystems, this division is completely different. The first includes economically developed capitalist countries, albeit with slightly different institutional structures, determined mainly by cultural systems. These include the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand on one side, and Japan and South Korea on the other. There are other examples, but the number of countries in this group is rather small.

The second group includes successful countries that in the past were considered poorly developed or were colonies of European countries, but after gaining independence or undergoing systemic changes have developed rapidly, transforming not only economically but also socially, as well as undertaking numerous scientific and innovative challenges, and having significant military potential. Their model is described as hybrid, being influenced by a number of factors, ranging from cultural systems to ideological ones, while at the same time rejecting those that have been the main focus of most developed countries in the past as well as today. Classic examples are countries such as China and India, or not too long ago also Brazil. We can list more countries like these, albeit with much less potential, especially on the Asian continent, including Singapore and Hong Kong.

The third group is made up of very diverse countries with various lengths of existence. On one hand, it includes some countries with longer relative sovereignty, as in the case of many countries in Central America, and on the other, an overwhelming majority of postcolonial states that became independent in the second phase of decolonization. Most of these countries are currently in a state of economic and institutional ruin, being plagued by numerous conflicts, both internal and external, often armed conflicts. The roots of these conflicts include territorial changes caused by decolonization, the different and very conflicting cultural systems, as well as lack of a cohesive institutional and legal system. Many of these countries depend on foreign capital, in fact resembling a colonial dependency. These countries follow a classic hybrid model, though in very diverse forms. Without going into predictions regarding their individual development, we can only say that in the coming decades only some of them will be able to become rel-

atively independent entities with developmental abilities, able to break free from dependency on other states or transnational corporations.

2. It is difficult to generalize the non-European world. We will touch on only a few aspects. Firstly, the division of the world will be quite permanent. Undoubtedly, there will be numerous reshuffles that have a significant impact not only on the well-being of these countries, but also on the global economy, the balance of power, and the ranking of countries that have a significant impact on the changing world and its future. Secondly, it is hard to imagine that the world might develop peacefully without any conflicts, including armed conflicts. Thirdly, economic, social and political diversity, as well as the challenges they create, will be constant components of the contemporary, as well as the future world.

3. The main question, however, that we should ask in this context is: what impact will individual countries have on Europe, its development, relationships and threats, etc. There is no easy answer, especially as the groups described above are very diverse, not only in economic, systemic and political terms, but also culturally. The world is undergoing not only profound changes, but indeed even a certain kind of turmoil. Europe needs to cooperate with other countries that differ economically, socially and politically. It needs to collaborate with the entire non-European world, with which it has economic and political ties. These collaborations have not always been beneficial, but Europe cannot function nor develop further without them. Some can bring new solutions to present day problems, and others are in need of assistance. Europe, though not all of it, has a debt to pay, especially when it comes to the third group of countries, for their colonial conquests and exploitation, both of natural and human resources. This debt can never be repaid in full, but more should be done to make amends and aid these countries, if not just to minimize threats, whether from the countries themselves as organized institutions, or numerous groups that are hostile to Europe, whether due to the colonial past or stemming from cultural differences.

How this collaboration will play out in the near and distant future is difficult to determine due to the major challenges Europe will have to face. But there is another problem, mainly whether or not the non-European world will be eager to engage in such cooperation. We should not expect all-out rejection of such cooperation, but rather collaboration only in specific areas or those of significant importance, both for Europe and the world, such as environmental protection, climate regulation, and similar areas.

4. The outside world's influence on Europe

The impact of the countries in Europe's environs on Europe itself will vary depending on the nature of individual states. It is not just current relations that play a role here, but history as well. We can group these countries in several dif-

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ferent ways. One such group of European countries is made up of former colonial powers, both those who ceased to have colonies after World War I, as well as those that gave them up gradually after World War II, whether it happened peacefully or through wars. Another group includes countries that actively participated in suppressing numerous conflicts in Africa and Asia. Finally, we can distinguish those nations that actively cooperate economically and provide educational assistance to non-European countries. Admittedly, however, are certainly many more ways of grouping these countries. What is crucial is to look at these countries from the point of view of emerging or already existing threats to Europe.

There are many different kinds of threats, but we will focus on the more general ones that, to some extent, concern the entire continent.

1. From a long-term perspective it seems that Europe, its main economic entities, as well as its economic position in the world may be threatened by the emergence of strong competitors, especially in Asia. They are gaining economic strength and power much faster and on a greater scale than Europe. There are two sides to this problem: economic and prestige-psychological.

Europe was the world's economic and political power for over two centuries. This began to change after World War I. Initially, the United States was the main competitor, but after World War II, things became much more complicated. Although the United States was still its main competition, Europe was now split in half politically, ideologically and economically for at least half a century. Rivalry with the socialist part of Europe continued to increase, not in terms of economics, as here the capitalist-market states had the upper hand, but in terms of political and military strength. This half-century of division brought many consequences and led to fundamental changes brought on by civilizational transitions, as well as economic growth in some Asian countries, such as Japan. Although these days the division of Europe is based on other factors, after the fall of communism and the transformation of post-communist countries, there are many new strong competitors, especially in Asia. This does not mean, however, that contemporary Europe is not divided, as previously mentioned.

Europe is gradually losing its dominant position. It seems to be an irreversible trend, but history has surprised us before, so one can never know for sure.

2. Another great threat, but perhaps also a future opportunity, is the refugee issue. The world has experienced an unprecedented demographic boom in the last two decades, and more importantly it has mainly, if not to say exclusively, taken place in Africa and Asia. The threat posed by this huge population growth is mainly due to the fact that these continents, especially Africa, are not prepared for such an explosion, economically, socially, politically, and above all, mentally. This significant population growth is occurring in places least prepared for it. Most African countries are only just beginning to create modern systems. This is due not only to the decolonization processes, the destruction of the old agrarian civilization, the gradual and rather slow rise of a hybrid civilization, but more

importantly, it is due to numerous armed conflicts. One of the more important consequences of this difficult situation is the growing exodus of people in search of better living conditions, mainly to Europe, which is not prepared for this inflow, neither institutionally nor mentally. The hostile attitude of most governments and societies to foreigners, and the spread of hostile, xenophobic and racist ideologies, contribute to divided societies. It is difficult to predict how this problem will be resolved. There are no sensible solutions in this case, which is due to cultural differences, and it seems that Europe will be struggling to resolve this refugee issue for many years, perhaps even decades to come, which will lead to numerous conflicts on our continent. Such conflicts are already taking place, although for the time being they are of an individual and group nature, as opposed to mass-scale conflicts. The problem, however, is growing rapidly, which is not conducive to positive, generally acceptable solutions.

The problem of refugees is one of the greatest long-term challenges for Europe. But paradoxically, refugees also provide an opportunity for Europe in terms of the depopulation of indigenous societies of the Old Continent. We will return to this issue in a slightly different context.

3. Some of the more serious challenges facing Europe include a potential religious war within Islam, partly including other religions, as well as the consequences of such a war for followers of other religions. It is estimated that there are currently over 1.5 billion Muslims, which is nearly 30% of the religious population worldwide. This is a significant issue as the threat of religious war is gaining momentum, not only because the Muslim population is growing, but also because Islamic states, at least some of them, are becoming increasingly wealthy and stronger militarily. Disputes between Sunnis and Shiites are also intensifying, which, aside from a religious conflict, has other consequences as it concerns the issue of leadership among the Muslims. At the present time, we are seeing signs of a looming religious war, including individual small or larger incidents that are no longer only limited to Muslims. On one hand, we are dealing with a continuous confrontation with Israel in the Middle East, and on the other, growing terrorism, not only on the part of Muslims, but mainly by individuals recruited from among this religious group.

At this point it is difficult to predict how this potential religious war will evolve. We can be sure, however, that this problem will not be resolved in the near future, at least not in the next decade, as it strongly depends on civilizational transitions. Only once the new stage of civilization, and especially its institutions, gains more momentum, could this issue finally be dealt with. There is no doubt, however, that Europe will experience some forms of religious disputes, which may lead to stronger political oppressiveness. What we do know is that future generations will have to learn how to function and, more importantly, grow in this situation.

4. The world is in the midst of great turmoil, with tensions and dangerous situations all over the world, including numerous armed conflicts in Africa,

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Asia, and partly in Central America and Europe (see: the Donbas, tensions regarding the Crimea issue, as well as Russia meddling in the affairs of EU member states). President Trump has withdrawn from the international accord on climate change as well as from nuclear agreements with Teheran, is imposing protectionist measures in some areas of global trade, and has unclear intentions towards North Korea, not to mention actions that undermine the existing institutional order in individual countries. All this prompts us to ask a terrifying question: are we heading for yet another world war? Although when we think of the last two world wars of the last century it is hard to believe that another world war can happen, but this is a real danger if one considers the nature of tensions in the world, especially the increased military strength of major world powers. Although it is only a probability, we must consider its potential. Such a threat does exist, and may increase in the future. And more importantly, it will involve all the continents.

5. In this context, we can formulate another long-term prediction about the world, concerning who is likely to be the main actors on the world stage. This is not our own prediction, but one that can be found in some American publications, mainly military ones – they discuss three major global powers: the United States, China and Russia, who may have different economic potential but similar military strength. They mention two possible scenarios. The first is a peaceful one where the competition will mainly involve economics and trade, helping these countries to grow. A second, more menacing scenario would be some type of a military conflict. This could lead to the next world war, much more dangerous than the previous two. One can only hope that this scenario will not come to fruition.