

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Any attempt at summing up such a complex subject-matter, as is attempting to answer our titular question of “Where is Europe headed”?, is essentially doomed to fall short. Be that as it may, based on our analysis and on observations of the world around us, we feel that a few general issues are nevertheless worthy of more focused attention.

We take as our point of departure here the view that we are living in times of a certain distinctive “civilizational chaos”. Such a description is apt in that we are observing such rapid emergence of a knowledge-based civilization (information society), which is changing the face of the prevailing industrial stage of civilization while at the same time essentially leading the agrarian stage to its demise. This complex set of circumstances is conducive to a certain chaos. The co-existence of systemic solutions that belong to different stages of civilization, while at the same time the global access to information continues to rise, makes for an incredibly complex phenomenon. It encompasses not only those fields that already form part of the information-society realm, but also fields where this next stage of civilization has not yet sufficiently taken root. In many parts of the world the emerging new civilization is still far from functioning normally, only constituting a certain expected vision of life-facilitating technological advancements, rather than a sociopolitical reality.

It is interesting to make a certain comparison of Europe’s current situation to its development over the nearly two centuries of industrial civilization. While stages of civilization are by nature not comparable in terms of their main characteristics and institutional forms, they are nevertheless characterized by certain elements of continuity, in other words the continued adoption of certain elements. Such a comparison may allow us to highlight favorable circumstances, as well as a certain type of dangers faced by Europe and the whole world. Treating Europe separately is justified in terms of the fact that it was the continent that gave rise to the industrial stage of civilization and it is one co-involved in creating the new, knowledge-based civilization nowadays. Let us look at the extant differences from this standpoint.

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

The first difference lies in the time factor. It is hard to clearly identify the time when the prerequisites for industrial civilization emerged, but by modest reckoning at least a century passed from the appearance of its very first harbingers to when it began to flourish. These early harbingers can be considered to include the beginnings of Enlightenment-age thought, which can be linked to Erasmus of Rotterdam, Gutenberg's invention of the printing-press, the end of religious warfare and the emergence of nascent sovereign national states, and James Watt's invention of the steam engine. Prerequisites for information-based civilization appeared significantly earlier than its flourishing, while the industrial stage of civilization remained ingrained. Among the factors conducive to the emergence of the new stage of civilization we can list television, the nuclear reactor, cruise missiles, the atomic bomb, the transistor, and digital computers – not to mention various socioeconomic experiments and, earlier, the appearance of various ideologies challenging the then-dominant socioeconomic system. Without getting into a deeper temporal analysis of the emergence of new stages of civilization, however, we should underscore the basic differences between them. The main one boils down to the ever-faster pace of the appearance of new technological solutions having a fundamental impact on how societies function and on people's standards of living. The main question that should be answered in this context is what factors were causative in this respect. A simple answer will point to the broad dissemination of education on all levels. The broad scope of education essentially inherently goes hand-in-hand with demand for new technological and social solutions, giving rise to a strong incentive for innovation. A more complex answer, however, will relate to several additional processes. The first of these is the spread of the market economy, the consequences of which have extended beyond the phenomenon of goods being produced by privately-owned means of production and sold via a free market. Societies, or especially certain specific social groups, began to grow wealthy, to yearn and strive for new goods and better living conditions. This can be generalized, for instance by pointing out that the human population living in cities at the start of the twentieth century represented 20% of the world population, whereas nowadays the figure is already more than 50%. The market economy has also contributed to vast income disparities, which are increasingly perceived by society. This, in turn, has entailed vast tension and social conflicts, generating new ideas related to the need for protection or, unfortunately, also a desire for effective aggression. Another cause, derivative in a certain sense, has been the extensive and diverse ideologization of politics. Aside from the increasingly widespread liberal ideology, with a democratic supplement, there gradually appeared a socialist (communist) ideology and a fascist ideology, which infected numerous European societies. In the period between WWI and WWII, Europe became differentiated not only economically, but also ideologically.

The second difference to be discussed here is the duration of time and the scope of the emergence of industrial civilization vs. information society. One fac-

In Lieu of a Conclusion

tor that typically characterized the former was its very limited spatial scope. The beginnings of industrial society should be sought in Western Europe, especially in the United Kingdom. Over the nineteenth century it had, however, not managed to cross the line of the Elba River, dividing Europe into a West, with a developing industrial civilization, vs an East, in which footholds of civilizational change appeared only selectively. Certain changes would not come until the interwar period, when many sovereign countries emerged out of the breakup of empires following WWI. However, civilizational change in Central Europe still remained largely slow and superficial in nature. The two great experiments with systems of governance – the Russian/Communist and the German/Fascist experiments – at the first stage eliminated the market economy and in the second stage subjugated it to strong state oversight, which in essence hampered its civilizational functions.

This spatially differentiated expansion of industrial civilization following WWI in Europe, during WWII began to spread relatively quickly to other continents, especially North America and certain countries of Asia, mainly in Japan. At the same time, in economically well-developed countries, especially in the United States, alongside the economic potential offered by industrial civilization, the toolbox of the new stage of civilization began to spread to an increasing extent. Some of the most spectacular effects of this newly emerging civilization were the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, other new forms of weaponry, and modern tools of communication. Modern technologies were quickly amassed also by the Soviet Army. We can sum up this line of reasoning by concluding that WWII spread up the process of equipping this new stage for civilization. The ultimate outcome of WWII was not, however, a favorable one for Europe in terms of systems of governance. A significant share of Central and Eastern Europe was turned over to the Soviet sphere of influence, and the socio-political system in those countries was not conducive to the new civilizational transition; at most it assisted in catching up certain arrears in developing industrial civilization.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed two important processes: the practical end of the process of decolonization on the one hand, and the demise of the socialist experiment on the other. This gave rise to the broad dissemination of aspects of industrial civilization and the gradual adoption of the tools of knowledge-based civilization. If we look at Europe from this standpoint, it is still diversified in terms of civilization, but the new stage has already deeply taken root (especially in the EU member states). These remarks boil down to the conclusion that while the information-based stage of civilization is spreading much more quickly than was the case for industrial civilization, although the spatial differential remains large (although its distribution is different both in Europe and in the world as compared to industrial civilization).

The third distinction to be made involves differences in how the human factor adapts to the quickly changing conditions of living and laboring. Every stage of civilization is characterized by a different mode and rhythm of work.

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

This entails numerous consequences, affecting not only individuals but also large social groups. This stems mainly from changes in the basic means of production, which defines the character of each stage of civilization: land in the case of agrarian civilization, production capital in the case of industrial civilization, and intellectual capital in the case of knowledge-based civilization, with a distinctive production domain operating according to new service-sector rules. Also important are changes in the human factor under the influence of the educational process. Without getting into a detailed analysis of this process and the significance of the individual changes, we should note the universality of the market economy, including the strong impact of globalization and new economic forms such as multinational corporations, international organizations and financial markets.

From the standpoint of the human factor's role, we can, it seems, point to three fundamental processes. First of all, many traditional professions have been eliminated or undergone significant modifications. This has necessitated a certain revamping of the educational process, which has not only gotten broader but also undergone profound qualitative changes. Education has become widespread and obligatory, and having the necessary qualifications is essential for employment. Secondly, the new stage of civilization necessitates certain processes of innovation, in both traditional and modern fields. This has wrought profound change in the labor market, including as a result of robotization and the increasingly broad application of artificial intelligence. A new class has formed, known as the *pre-cariat*. The profession one is trained to practice, and employment in that profession, have ceased to be life-long. Fluidity in the labor market and the need to continually gain new training or even to change profession have become an if not widespread, then at least very common phenomenon. Thirdly, the need to shift one's place of employment is growing common, both within one's home country and outside it. This is related to the increasing internationalization of economic and research processes. The system of interconnections is becoming ever stronger, and companies' interests are becoming highly international. This is demanding a completely new type of behavior from increasingly numerous groups of employees at institutions, corporations, banks in numerous countries. This is not an easy process, both for family reasons and in view of the change of surroundings, often to culturally foreign places.

These phenomena are growing increasingly more commonplace in Europe, in the EU in particular. The movement of people has two different causes. One is driven by employment in an international company or EU institutions, while the other is an individual pathway striving for better employment with higher pay. Both of these phenomena are occurring today on ever-larger scales. We do not fully know to what extent this will draw the European society closer together – both positive and negative experiences already exist in this respect.

1. Mechanisms of knowledge-based civilization: communication and visualization

Aside from multifarious economic mechanisms, the new stage of civilization has unleashed two new mechanisms, very important from the social standpoint, albeit with both a positive and a negative character. Due to its new *instrumentarium* (toolbox), information society has given rise to new systems of communication, thanks to which the work has become more open, and also more familiar. Thanks to the Internet, social media portals, email communication, smartphones and many other tools, virtually everyone new enjoys relative ease in making contact and communication with nearly the whole world. At the same time, anyone can easily spread their own opinions, pertaining to both true and false events and facts. This type of communication has created a new situation in nearly all fields of social life. This is a new and very important mechanism, promoting new products and services in socially important fields, as well as various ideologies and political groups. This may of course be socially advantageous as well as disadvantageous. Possibilities of this sort are being harnessed by political parties promoting various views in support of the liberal-democratic order, as well as parties opposed to that order, promoting other views, sometimes extremely nationalist or xenophobic, even fascist. This is clearly visible in the EU, where Eurosceptic parties have the ability to discredit the EU, especially its policies intended to strengthen the integration process. It is hard to say definitively while type of views predominate and how well they resonate in individual companies. One thing is definitely certain, however – views critical of the EU are articulated in all member states, something which manifests itself in the resurgence of parties in favor of a Europe of national homelands, understood differently than how the EU's role is generally treated.

Another important facet of the new stage of civilization is how visible all phenomena have become, even from great distances, being accessible to most societies and enabling people to compare their standards of living and employment very closely to those prevailing in other countries and other continents. The possibility of becoming familiar with the vast social diversity on the global scale leads to two kinds of attitudes. On the one hand, one can imitate better solutions seen elsewhere, or on the other, seeing them may give rise to envy, or even hostility. This is a widespread phenomenon, including on European soil. It is hard to judge which of these attitudes appears more frequently. However, because altering living conditions is not possible in a short period of time, we can surmise that it is the latter. Sometimes the blame for this is pinned on the ruling elite, sometimes on others, real or alleged external “enemies”. In other words, in most cases this

WHERE IS EUROPE HEADED?

visibility, the easy access to intelligible information, has a negative impact on the social mood.

2. The clash of civilizations

The notion of a “clash of civilizations” was popularized by Huntington (1993, 1996) and has gained great currency. Huntington essentially sees all civilizational differences as involving cultural systems, or in essence religious beliefs. Although differences stemming from cultural systems do play an extraordinarily important role in the mutual relations between nations or ethnic groups, it is hard to see them as representing the sum whole of the problem of civilizational divergence – which alongside the so-called cultural apparatus also includes technological-economic apparatus and institutional apparatus. If we speak of a clash of civilizations, therefore, we should here be jointly considering the socioeconomic, cultural and institutional systems that are linked to the level of development characterizing a given civilization.

The “clashes of civilization” that occur as a result of turning-points between stages of development are of a different nature, as they involve the destruction of the existing institutional infrastructure, economic structures, social hierarchies, and many other fields crucial to the functioning of societies in a specific stage of civilization. In the case of every civilizational clash, there always exists a rivalry, or even struggle between what dominated in the old civilization and what represented the main driving force instituting the new one. The modern epoch is distinctive in that we are dealing with a certain double transition of civilization. While the knowledge-based civilization is emerging as the next, post-industrial stage, at the same time the agrarian civilization – which just a few decades ago prevailed over an area representing nearly 2/3s of the world population – is seeing its demise.

The civilizational chaos has, it seems, several key facets. The first and most important revolves around the question of what should be held over from industrial civilization into knowledge-based civilization, and what should be rejected. The second concerns the mechanisms and pace of development of the new civilization. A new stage of civilization is always related to the destruction of the old, together with the economic, financial, social, and political costs of that destruction. The proper distribution of those costs among society and the way decisions are made in this respect is a key element in the change of civilizations. The third facet pertains to the ideology and political vision meant to dominate in the new civilization. The fourth and final facet relates to the question of how a knowledge-based civilization should be created on the ruins of the agrarian civilization. This question is of crucial importance, as regions that are delayed in development are at the same time areas where the greatest demographic boom is playing out.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

As yet there are no clear questions to these questions, and the methods being used to attempt to resolve these problems are often not only inadequate for the purpose, they are also highly conflict-prone. And this is the main source of the existing civilizational chaos.

Although the above considerations are of a worldwide scope, in a great many aspects they apply to Europe as well. And this will to a great extent be decisive for the ultimate answer to the question: *Where is Europe headed?*