



Globalisation and the Great Contemporary Challenges

Stefan Ciochinaru

Prof. Ion Bogdan Street 9, corp A, ap. 2, sector 1, Bucharest, 010538 Romania

ABSTRACT

The race towards integration has become more competitive in a world where the most powerful states in the world are striving to complete their integration process. The European Union, the ASEAN, NAFTA, the Arab League, MERCOSUR are a few examples. Moreover, the Russian Federation has put forth the prospect of a Eurasian Union.

This paper is an attempt to present and analyse the globalisation phenomenon, which emerged towards the end of the "Cold War" and repositioned existing social and political structures under the "global state" formula, while mankind began to pave the way from "the nation-state to global structures".

Consequently, we will focus on the the specific processes that influence the world nowadays, in order to understand the complex and fluid trends of globalisation as a possibility to restructure and renew continents and even the world system in its entirety.

KEYWORDS : globalisation, integration, global structures, nation-states, emerging powers

In their seminal work "The First Revolution. A Report by the Council of the Club of Rome", authors Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider (1993) draw attention to a phenomenon in full progress, which is meant to change the world we live in from its very roots: integration.

Almost twenty years ago, when referring to the technological revolution in the field of mass communication, the Canadian researcher Marshall McLuhan (1967) noted that the logic of progress itself is the factor that pushes mankind towards a "global village", under the contract of the electronic media.

In his opinion, the social, economic, and political developments in the contemporary world might be characterised as a redefinition of all existing structures in the formula of the "world village". This means that mankind will advance by leaps and bounds "from the nation-state to the global structures", thus reaching a transformation so profound that the future will entirely belong to this "global village".

While uttering his political "will", the former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors¹ highlighted the concept of "global village" in front of hundreds of politicians, businessmen and journalists attending the Davos Conference in Switzerland. The moment when integrationism was born can be set between these symbolic brackets - one theoretical, the other political, a process with a significance to be matched only by its extraordinary complexity.

Richard Baldwin, from The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, noticed that globalisation has a measurable impact not only on international relations, but also on the current regional and global regulations (Baldwin, 1994), while Amitai Etzioni, former Advisor of President Jimmy Carter and Professor of Sociology at the American University in Washington, noted that the globalisation processes are desired by some and contested by others (Etzioni, 2002).

In his turn, Riccardo Petrella noted in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that globalisation of capital has accelerated the internationalisation of investments and of the productive system, along with an extensive regional integration of trade flows (Petrella, 1993).

It is therefore not surprising that, generally speaking, globalisation has been so differently defined, often in relation to the interests represented by the personalities in question or those of the respective companies and trusts.

Many analysts had originally defined globalisation as an expression of the economical and financial concentration under the control of large transnational companies. There has been a lot of talk about the "new industrial revolution" that has opened up unimagined opportunities for the economic growth and resulted in small competitors being removed out from the international markets in favour of big transnational capital.

Thus, globalisation has given birth to a new system of economic and financial relations, under "a quasi total control" (Ramonet, as cited in Pleyers, 2010) of an oligarchy that has acquired discretionary powers. Riccardo Petrella shows that these oligarchs are based on social groups and elites that have acquired the power of decision and control, beyond the forms of representativeness and political and social legitimisation of the nation-states. The same Italian analyst observed that the abdication of politics is almost total, the methods used to implement globalisation are, par excellence, economic and financial, while the political decision makers at national level reveal obvious compromise, with a personal motivation as a rule. Understanding the processes taking place and being aware of the serious consequences involved, certain people with political responsibility do not oppose simply for not being removed from power. Moreover, multinational companies enter without any barrier into the most diverse sectors, from the strategic and military ones, transports, communications until those related to science or basic and applied research, operating a fundamental mutation within the decision area, which has been taken over from the nation-state by the "world village" - The Global Village².

On the other hand, a number of analysts and experts in international relations have predicted, for many years, the junction, under the Empire of globalism, between the East European communism and Western democracies. On 15 December 1987, Senator Jesse Helms, former Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, reminded of the backstage agreements between the leaders of Kremlin and some mondialist Western networks:

"A careful examination of what is happening behind the scenes reveals that all of these interests are working in concert with the masters of the Kremlin in order to create what some refer to as a 'New World Order'. Private organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Trilateral Commission, the Dartmouth Conference, the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, the Atlantic Institute, and the Bilderberg Group serve to disseminate and to coordinate the plans for this so-called new world order in powerful business, financial, academic, and official circles."

"(...) The viewpoint of the establishment today is called globalism (...)."

In the globalist point of view, nation-states and national boundaries do not count for anything. Political philosophies and political principles seem to become simply relative. Indeed, even constitutions are irrelevant to the exercise of power.... In this point of view, the activities of international financial and industrial forces should be oriented to bringing this one-world design — with a convergence of the Soviet and American systems as its centerpiece—into being". (Helms, 1987)

"The world is a level playing field" — warns Thomas L. Friedman, the famous american journalist and three-time Pulitzer Prize winner (in 1983, 1988 and 2002). After a laborious research work and interviews with the most enlightened minds of the contemporary world, Friedman has

published his book "The World is Flat" (Friedman, 2007), a bold vision of the 21st century. Thus, the beginning of the 3rd millennium will remain in history, as the American journalist thinks, not because of the military conflicts which bled it nor because of the political events which have shaken the planet, but due to humanity entering a new phase of globalisation: "the flattening of the World". Friedman draws attention to the fact that, under the double effect of globalisation and the digital revolution, which transgress political and commercial boundaries, knowledge and resources all over the world connect with each other and level the global playing field, flatten it, right before our eyes. How did the World become flat? "Ten political events, innovations and major companies" have contributed to that. From the moment this flattening started, we have entered a new stage in the history of humanity, as witnesses of the digitising, virtualisation and automation of nearly anything belonging to man's life. Friedman prophesies even the tremendous gains in productivity for all the countries, companies and individuals able to assimilate the new technology tools.

"The real information revolution is about to begin" announces Friedman. He calls it the "Third Era of Globalisation", different in intensity and essence from everything so far. David Rothkopf a visionary who worked for the Department of Commerce under the Clinton administration, coined the word globalisation in order to better describe the changing relationships between governments and major business. However, Rothkopf noticed that what is happening now is a much broader and much deeper phenomenon. And this because it is no longer just about the way governments, businesses and individuals communicate, we no longer have to do with the way in which organizations interact, but with the emergence of unprecedented political, social and business models (as cited in Friedman, 2007).

Quoting Rothkopf, Friedman is convinced that the World shall continue to flatten: The process itself will be seen over time as one of those fundamental changes or as a decisive moment, as happened after the invention of the printing press, after the emergence of the nation-state or after the Industrial Revolution. Phenomena that have brought in their time shifts in the role of individuals, changes in forms of governance, of the way business was done and wars were carried out, in the forms that art and religion adopted and in the way science and research were designed. Not to mention the political labels that we, as a civilization, have assigned to us and to our enemies. There are in history certain pivot-points, or turning moments, which are more important than others, because the changes that have occurred have been so comprehensive, so complex and hard to predict at that time.

The state of insecurity generated by the flattening phenomenon of the World is explicable, because the process is carried out as such a speed. The spreading pace of printing letters of Johannes Gutenberg had been relatively slow, nor did the Industrial Revolution mark a large geographical area. Instead, Thomas L. Friedman points out, the process of flattening takes place with incredible speed and directly or indirectly affects much more people on the planet. The faster and more complex this transition to a new era, the greater the danger of disunity, when compared to an orderly transfer of power from the old winners to the new ones. The danger for the national states, institutions, business and individuals do not take from the fact that they lack direction, flexibility and imagination to adapt themselves, or that they are not smart enough or aware of the rapidity of the changes, which is simply overwhelming. And there is still the danger that in this world of ultra-fast changes people might feel outclassed or abandoned.

The first factor that contributed to the birth of the Flat World was the collapse of communism in Europe in 1989. The shock was propagated far away. Not everyone was satisfied. Older generations were hard to change. To be sure, communism ensured a job for everyone, a home, an education and a pension for everyone, even if they were rather poor. As stated before, the shock of the fall of communism was felt by billions of people in far-away places like India, Brazil, China and many other countries. The fall of communism unlocked repressed energies, leveled alternatives at planetary-scale and allowed people to have a different approach of the world, which started to be perceived as an inseparable whole. Paradoxically, the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of Apple computers and Windows operating systems, the huge exchange and storage of knowledge led to the fall of communism.

A few brilliant IT minds have pushed the flattening of the World revo-

lution even further. First, the two American scientists Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn invented the Internet. Then, the British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee designed the concept of the World Wide Web (a system for creating, organizing and accessing documents so they can be easily found on the Internet). Friedman points out that the World Wide Web was the first innovation that gave life to the Internet - turning it into a connection and collaboration tool, a tool accessible to anyone, not only to computer science specialists. In only five years, the number of users jumped from 600,000 to 40 million people. After Cerf, Kahn and Berners-Lee, other computer scientists created the whole culture of Web browsing (produced by the American company, Netscape) and the operating system Windows 95 (a Microsoft product). The market simply exploded, because words, music, books, data, entertainment and downloadable photos on the Internet could be easily digitized. Supply and demand, transported and sold on the Internet, were becoming infinite. Therefore, after the flattening stage, Apple-PC-Windows started the Internet e-mail browser and together made more and more people communicate with each other more than ever, no matter where they were. But the fun was just getting started, as Friedman warns.

The emergence and integration of software for the automation of workflows was a silent revolution. It started to manifest itself in the mid-1990s and had a huge impact on the world. It was not long until the scientific research industry produced a new language for describing data (XML) and its associated transport protocols (SOAP). These extraordinary innovations have allowed two different computers, even at tens of thousands of km from each other, to exchange data, documents, information of all kinds, invoices, financial transactions, medical records, bank statements, images, WEB pages, advertisements, quotes or entire books etc. Microsoft, IBM and many other companies have put their shoulder to the development of XML and SOAP. A system for a globally comprehensive workflow for both humans and computers was born. For the first time, man was no longer involved in the communication between computers over Internet.

The use of standardised protocols in the workflow automation will lead to a new explosion of experiments and innovations. This is the time when the platform of the flattening of the World began to take form, says Friedman.

So, first of all the fall of political walls, the emergence of Windows and of the PC, then the spread of the Internet and the web browser, thanks to optical fiber, all of them have played their role in connecting people and sharing digitised information easier than ever. When standardised transmission paths and the protocols that have made the connection between computers and software applications appeared, people were not only directly connected, but they could even work together, without obstacles between them, on the digital content of each one of them. More than ever, they could build coalitions, set up and put into motion companies, trade in goods and sell services. This is the Genesis of the flat World, says Friedman, and it happened after the mid-1990s. It was truly a new Genesis. This platform of the flat World, created by the three forces, resulted in six other flattening factors identified by Friedman. First of all, the Open Sourcing, which allows online collaboration of people scattered on all meridians, but working together on the same project. Thus the blogs and the already famous Wikipedia emerged.

Another flattening factor is the out sourcing of production and services, the big companies delegating certain activities to some smaller and more efficient companies. The off-shore system has become increasingly more than an attractive alternative to Western manufactures. Other companies practice insourcing, rendering specialized services on behalf of other companies (UPS provides service to Toshiba computers). Dramatic changes have occurred in the supply chains, which have become - thanks to the new technologies — much more flexible and easier to control.

The development of Internet search engines (Google, Yahoo!, MSN Web Search) also had a tremendous impact. Friedman explains: never in the history of the planet have so many people had so much information at their fingertips. Wireless technology and the Steroids technologies represent the last, though not final, information revolution. Friedman describes the nature of this revolution that is happening right before our eyes, although very few of us can understand it: engines and computers can now communicate with each other, people can talk to people, computers with computers and people can talk with computers

at huge distances, extremely fast, inexpensively, and easily. The war between the mastodons of science and of information industry is more fierce than ever, tens of billions of dollars are spent on intelligence in this exclusive world, the mind of top IT specialists is more guarded than ever and everything moves with the swiftness of a science-fiction script.

Finally, another defining factor of the globalisation processes and integration of mankind lies in the formidable demographic expansion of the human race that raises problems almost unsurpassable in the current logic of development. The dramatic growth of the population of the planet over the last century is unprecedented in history. It took two million years before the planet's population reached 1 billion in 1804. The second billion was reached in 1927, the third in 1960, the fourth in 1974, the fifth in 1987 and the sixth even in early 2000.

The impact of population growth on economic development, food security and environmental quality has been for a long time more than a topic of dispute and continues to be that way. There are currently two groups of theorists approaching these issues on diametrically opposed positions.

Taking its name and doctrinal orientation from the English economic theorist Thomas Malthus (founder of the theory that bears his name – Malthusianism and author of the already classic "An Essay on the Principle of Population", published in 1798), the neo-malthusians believe that the population of the world is engaged in an activity that generally leads to depletion of natural resources of our planet, reducing every day the capacity of humanity to meet the requirements of their generation and in particular of those to come.

Since the issue of Malthus' work and up to the present days, the world population has increased sixfold, whilst the amount of energy used each year was multiplied a hundred times. The area covered by forests has been reduced by one-third, and the composition of the atmosphere has been damaged as a result of human activity. Hundreds of millions of people suffer from malnutrition and even more millions of people die of hunger every year in the underdeveloped countries. Hundreds or even thousands of species of plants and animals have become extinct and many others are endangered.

In contrast with the pessimistic vision of neo-malthusians, the vision the other group of theorists, the "population growth optimists", emphasizes completely different global trends. Global life expectancy has doubled in the course of the 20th century, peaking at 64 years, while infant mortality has dropped from 170 children born dead per 1,000 births in 1950, to just 60 in 1990. The rapid increase of population is primarily due to reduction of mortality and not to the birth rate growth. Despite of a tri-fold growth of the world population during the twentieth century, labour productivity has grown into a much higher proportion, and the health status of the population considerably improved. Nowadays people eat better, produce more and consume more than in the past. Overpopulation is a notion that was poorly understood and poorly defined, in the vision of the "population growth optimists". The problems that are commonly associated with the concept of "overpopulation" – such as famine or overcrowding of urban areas are, in fact, problems caused by poverty and not by "overpopulation".

It is difficult to say which of the two groups, neo-malthusians or the population growth optimists are right, as history does not yet provide a clear answer to these issues. It is therefore clear that the population itself is not the cause of these problems the world is facing today; it is, however, a factor that exacerbates other problems, among them a poor administration, inadequate government policies, political instability, excessive consumption of resources, the use of inappropriate technologies.

A very important problem, which is a basic component of changes produced by globalisation, is the security of the environment. The traditional concept of security has evolved throughout the cold war period; security shall be understood as a function of the competition the world states were engaged in, in order to exercise power. Environment security is a totally different approach to the concept of security. Environment security has two components: prevention of the modification of environmental factors as a result of the armed conflicts and the impact of the overall degradation of the natural environment upon the gen-

eral welfare of the human society and upon the global and national economy.

The concern caused by the deterioration of the environment security is based on the reality of decreasing natural resources such as fresh water, fertile soil, forests, fisheries, as well as of the biological diversity as a result of the extinction of countless species of flora and fauna. There is also a continuous deterioration of the living environment, such as for instance the ozone layer, climate, atmosphere, planetary ocean, as a result of the accelerating global economic activity. On long term, all these changes can have dramatic effects in the absence of certain measures taken in due time and aimed at the elimination of the causes as well, not only of the effects of environment quality deterioration. Otherwise, it is very likely that some of the changes might become irreversible.

The cross-border nature is a specific characteristic of environment security. The threats to the natural environment are just as important for the future of mankind as well as the threat represented by the possibility of a nuclear disaster. As the environment degradation affects the welfare of population and the performance of both national and global economy, the governments of various states are becoming concerned about the magnitude of this phenomenon. Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are becoming more and more willing to co-operate in order to find feasible and acceptable solutions.

A major event in the approach to the environment security issue is the Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (U.N.C.E.D.) which gathered together more than 150 states, 1,400 non-governmental organizations and nearly eight thousand journalists. The programme of action agreed in Rio de Janeiro, "the Programme 21", gives consistency to certain political decisions related to environment security and economic development.

The recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach to the welfare issue was as well marked at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, where specific demographic issues within a context to support development were addressed from a global perspective, in interconditioning with the specific interests of each participating country. The concern for finding remedies to global environmental problems was also stated at the summit of the "Rio Plus Five", a new international conference held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1997.

The majority of specialists in environmental issues opines that the next fifty years will be decisive to assess how healthy our planet shall be in the centuries to come. It is necessary during this period to harmonize our way of life with the available technologies and with the entire population, in all its diversity.

Under these circumstances, the various interdisciplinary study groups, futurologists and political analysts unanimously agree that under the impact of globalisation, the 21st century shall be dominated by conglomerates of integrated states, no matter under what name they shall be known. The signs of this genuine race for the conquest of the future can be seen as of now. Before our eyes, almost imperceptibly, a series of integration processes occurred on the entire planet. Europe (EU), North America (NAFTA), Asia (ASEAN) and the Eurasian Union promoted by the Russian Federation redefine the world we are living in. It must be said that none of these transformations have materialized overnight. The seed of the present global revolution slowly germinated over the years, in the decades that have elapsed since the end of World War II, during what was called the "cold war", the process of decolonization in the third world, the industrial revolution in the second world, the green revolution in agriculture, robotics, genetic engineering and microelectronics – all revolutionary processes that deeply changed the very foundations of the old world. During this time, the complexity, uncertainty and rapidity of changes have reached levels unprecedented in history and have started to leave behind the world governance capacity.

The question that arises today is how shall an international system be

under the influence of emerging economies? The Romanian Professor Mircea Malița described in 2011, at a conference held at Rotary Club of Bucharest two possible scenarios: one optimistic and the other pessimistic. To the optimistic one belongs integration and separation to the pessimistic one. In terms of real-politik, it is quite possible to witness a consolidation of current trends: restoration of power politics and geopolitical influence zones reaffirmation, after Medvedev doctrine model. The political researcher and former Chairman of the US Council on Foreign Relations Richard Haass believes that we shall witness significant changes in the landscape of international alliances, anticipating the dynamic arrangements dominated by Lord Palmerston's logic, more than 150 years ago: a state has neither friends nor permanent enemies, only permanent interests.

All these developments outline a world of selective co-operation, in which the main players will be less the traditional alliances and increasingly the more flexible coalitions of conjuncture, built around a strategic interest point. As a whole, the international relations present themselves as a co-existence between order and randomness, between society and anarchy. In this respect, the stability of the system may be determined by the ability of the great powers to reach a consensus on the rules of the game and impose them to the states still rejecting them.

As a matter of fact, most experts believe that the main strategic challenge of the international community over the next 25 years will be the integration of the emerging powers within a coherent system of norms and rules globally desirable. At stake is their absorption into a structure of order built around unanimously accepted international rules. The progress and welfare of all directly depend on integration into the global economy. That is why the new emerging powers are concerned to be inside rather than outside the system.

Nowadays, we are witnessing a veritable Fourth World War, known as the economic and financial crisis and the developments are extremely fluid, without too many constraints, in danger of not being able to be controlled. In this context, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by globalisation requires not only the ability to revamp and renew one continent or another, a sphere of influence or another of a certain great power, but the very world system in its entirety.

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