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Global Scenarios until 2030: Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World: Determining the Challenges and Opportunities for Europe

Source: 'Global Trends 2030: Citizens in an interconnected and polycentric world', a publication of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, edited by Álvaro de Vasconcelos.

1.   About the Report

'Global Trends 2030: Citizens in an interconnected and polycentric world' is a first report of this type prepared by the European Union Institute for Security Studies [1]. This is probably the first time that an EU institution has undertaken work with a team of European researchers who have looked outward in search of a global perspective on the challenges ahead. The report intends to give a European perspective on the global challenges of the future without focusing on inter-state relations. By concentrating on trends, this report is similar in nature to the National Intelligence Council report on Global Trends 2030 (Please refer to OTP 3/2013). Although it primarily covers the core areas like: information technology; economic development; migration; climate change and natural resources, it also focuses on the evolution of citizens' rights, demands and expectations. There is no reference to the Council of Europe in the text even though Europe is consistently understood in the broader sense than the 27 EU member states.

2.   Trends

The basic premise of the report is simple: the world is experiencing a period of profound transformation which involves a high level of uncertainty. Some major trends, such as those in the fields of demographics or technology can already be identified but their long-term consequences on the international scene still necessitate further monitoring and studies. The report identifies several global trends which will shape the world in 2030; the present paper will concentrate only on some of those which create important challenges and opportunities for Europe.

i.   Individual Empowerment in the Globalised Information Society

The information and communications technology revolution will be a key driver of individual empowerment, facilitating the way people share ideas and affirm their rights. New technologies will help to give a voice to their demands and will be crucial to political mobilisation, participation and the spread of universal values. At the same time, an increased vocalisation of demands will contrast with

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[1] The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) is an agency of the European Union. It operates under the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

the diminishing governments' capacity to deliver public goods, in particular those relating to improving the quality of life. It is likely in the future that the awareness of citizens worldwide will grow and a sense of belonging to a single human community will deepen. Therefore, values will converge allowing the creation a universal set of fundamental freedoms and economic and social rights.   In these circumstances, Europe should not miss the opportunity to spread its models of tolerance and human rights, while at the same time it must endeavour to improve and modernise its models of development and democracy.

ii.   Deficiencies of the Current Economic Growth Model

At a time of economic crisis and changing world balance, the Western economic growth model is coming under critical scrutiny. Not only experts, but citizens alike, feel that it cannot be maintained. Therefore the central issue in the future will be to what extent the major economic powers (Europe, Japan and the USA) can reformulate their current growth model and build new competitive advantages to influence global economy. According to the authors of the report, European political leaders should to that end "re-organise the economic and political governance of the Eurozone, to establish a fiscal union".

The report states that the financial crisis of 2008 is likely to have an enduring and heavy impact on citizens' well-being in Europe by reducing the middle class strata and creating a category of 'new poor' (as already seen in the USA). An increase of impoverishment and unemployment among the middle classes could bring serious repercussions to social and political order. Moreover, a serious brain drain from impoverished regions would be a threat to sustainable development in Europe.

iii.   Demographic Patterns and Migration

Should the impact of the crisis endure, it could lead nationals of developed countries to migrate, transforming many traditional 'host' countries into societies that 'export' migrants. 'Traditional' migrants might also decide to return to their countries of origin, or to engage in 'circular' migration. If the economic situation improves, Europe will still need to face a serious demographic situation: low birth rates and ageing societies. At a time when Europe's population is undergoing demographic transition and fears are rising about the future, Europe is particularly vulnerable to populism and extremist nationalism. However, there is no way forward for Europe other than to adapt to migration and multicultural societies. In these circumstances and in the face of radicalisation, cultural and religious freedoms must be guaranteed.

iv.   Scarcity of Natural Resources and an Emphasis on Sustainable Development

Greater natural resource scarcity (e.g. fossil fuels) and the awareness of the consequences of climate change will put greater emphasis on the need for sustainable development. However, new environment friendly policies and the development of new technologies might not be sufficient to address the scarcity of natural resources (e.g. water, rare earth metals, etc.). European energy security over the next 20 years will remain vulnerable to conflict-prone relations between suppliers, transit and consumer

countries. Key actors in this respect will be the countries of the Caspian and Central Asian region and some of the EU's neighbourhood countries. Authors forecast that cuts in supply may occur for political and economic reasons. The wider Caspian and Black Sea region is likely to remain a source of tension because of the unresolved legal status of the Caspian Sea, the persistence of conflicts in the region, and strained relations between Russia and neighbouring states.

3. Europe in the Polycentric World – Challenges and Opportunities

Even if over the next 20 years, the USA and China are the most influential actors on the global stage, there will be no single hegemonic power in the world. Europe and the USA will lose some of their influence and agenda-setting monopoly. The rising middle powers will contribute to the diffusion of power. Moreover, the fifty greatest world megacities will have a concentration of more resources and power than most of the low and middle-income countries combined. As a result, the unpredictability of international relations will grow and effective and capable international institutions will be more indispensable. However, in a polycentric world characterized by a proliferation of ideas it will be harder to attain consensus even on matters requiring urgent global action.

i. Regionalism in the World of Networks

By 2030, network society will have become a global reality within and across nations. The rise of strong civil societies and NGOs will continue worldwide, especially in democratic societies. NGOs could be increasingly responsible for providing public goods and promoting human rights, as there is a tendency to delegate state power to non-state actors and networks. The Council of Europe should use this opportunity to reinforce its co-operation with civil society, which will be crucial to modernise support for democracy and human rights in Europe and beyond.

As power shifts away from states, new models of international governance beyond national powers will also be needed. Multilateral institutions are already subject to increasing pressure to reform their structures and better reflect shifting power relations. Although greater inclusiveness seems to be a positive trend on the global scene, it could also signify a decline in Europe's influence over international bodies (e.g. UN). Nevertheless, it seems that the most crucial factor in determining regional influence will be the capacity to build regional co-operation groups able to promote peace and social development.

ii. Universal Spread of Human Rights and Democracy

Current trends suggest that human rights and freedom of expression will become even more cherished values. Increasing prosperity will act as a catalyst for gradual value change, with the development of a greater attachment to democratic institutions and individual liberties[2]. All over the world, the middle

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[2] Today, around four out of every five people worldwide (regardless of differences in religion, gender and age) believe that democracy is the best available system of government.

classes that tend to be aware of their rights will become a powerful force pushing for the improvements in governance. They could be an effective guardian of the public sector's transparency and accountability. Seen from this perspective, the Council of Europe's instruments which watch over the high standards in those areas could be of increasing relevance also to societies outside of Europe.

iii.   Growing Governance Gap

As millions of individuals emerge from poverty and become empowered, there will be an increasing demand for fairer and more democratic societies. At the same time, the inability of governments to meet citizens' aspirations will carve an expectations gap which may become a source of desperation and revolt. If this gap is not narrowed by national and global initiatives in favour of fundamental rights, poverty reduction, public participation and transparency it might amplify extreme nationalism and populism. Also, in Europe, the failure to address the economic crisis and declining living standards could open the way to the intensification of right and left-wing populist movements. As a result Europe could become introverted and defensive. The conclusion for the Council of Europe is clear: if it is successful in funding instruments to close this growing governance gap, its relevance will be boosted.

iv.   Regional Conflicts in Europe

The prospect of European integration will continue to serve as an incentive to the peaceful solution of existing conflicts in Europe. If the prospect of EU membership is removed, this may have extremely detrimental effects on internal and border disputes in the regions (e.g. Bosnia-Herzegovina). According to the authors, nationalism in the Balkans could be mitigated by the European integration process. The division of Cyprus could be alleviated by greater convergence between the EU and Turkey, but if difficulties concerning the process of enlargement to Turkey persist, the solution of the Cyprus question could become even more problematic. The report predicts that by 2030 all states in Europe willing to join the EU are likely to have become members.

v.   Opportunities for Europe

The authors of the report assert that the political impact of Europe will depend on its capacity to take effective international action. Given the democratic and open nature as well as the attractiveness of its culture, Europe still possesses significant soft power attributes. It can attract other nations, notably in its neighbourhood, as well as a growing number of non-state actors. But the maintenance and development of its soft power capabilities will depend on its ability to renew its growth model, protect its social model, and on how it deals with rising populism, xenophobia and anti-immigration policies. Indirectly, the latter factor reaffirms the growing importance of the work of the Council of Europe.

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