

Global Trends 2030

Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World

It is difficult and courageous to try to define global trends for the next twenty years. It is especially difficult to do this in turbulent times - with permanently changing economic and political environment. Nevertheless the report of ESPAS (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System) is a highly valuable and welcome look into the future. Or better in possible futures.

What are the major shifts we have to discuss and for which we have to prepare ourselves? There are changes and shifts everywhere. But there are shifts inside the countries, between countries in the different regions and between the world regions. But there are also structures which do not change and which seem to be fixed. One of them is the unequal distribution between income and wealth. In the last years there was even a reverse change: a rising gap between rich and poor.

Inequality in connection with unemployment and precarious jobs is one of the major factors of protest and especially of the "indigenes" and occupy movement. We still do not know if and how these protest may influence our future. But they are an expression of disappointment and of lack of meeting the expectations of our societies and their individuals by politics. These protest movements want an empowerment of the citizens, without knowing how and for what purpose to use it. If Lee Kuan Yew the former Singapore premier is right, that the search for an easy and happy life of the Europeans is vain, because China and India has come to the world market with cheaper products - and cheaper labour, how do we reconcile the aspirations of our citizens and the realities of globalization?

Politics and Politicians are anyway in a very strange situation. Lack of confidence and mistrust - and the "markets" make their life difficult. There are already a lot of victims of these tendencies. In some countries technocrats took over and try to save the countries from bankruptcy. In others politicians were thrown out of office after having failed with their reform concept. Even as the newly elected majority and government has no alternative to offer. It is not sure what the crises means for the rise of populism. In some countries populism and populist party became stronger and their influence on government policies grew.

The rising populism and nationalism is a contradiction to what the authors of the study call "age of convergence". Yes there exist "increasing interdependence and shared aspirations and grievances" but these do not lead automatically to " a growing sense that citizens everywhere share a common humanity". Sometimes the contrary is the case. It may lead to growing nationalism and stubbornness. And here the authors are right when they state : "Resurgent nationalism will remain the most potent challenge to national democracy". And of course also to forms of supranational democratic decision making. The EU and it's discussion and aspiration to find a balance between national and European democratic institutions is demonstrating that difficulty.

As mentioned already before the global income and wealth situation is as unequal and unfair as before. There are some countries where the situation improved and others where it became worse. Climate change will contribute to unfairness and hardship. New migration flows may result and new tensions may be the consequence. And Europe needs a demographic rejuvenation but the social and psychological climate are in opposition to that necessity. It is one of that "impossible necessities" we have to deal with.

It is obvious that the next twenty years will bring a new balance or imbalance of the different regions and continents of our world. As the authors stated : " The world of 2030 will be diffusely multipolar and polycentric. We will have China - in close cooperation with India or without - as perhaps the biggest economic and political (and military?) power. And already Niall Ferguson speaks of a "Peking Consensus" where state and private capitalism are mixed (successfully?) in contrast to the "Washington Consensus" with its agenda of liberalisation and deregulation.

But we will also have numerous "middle powers" . They already now show their strength for example as veto powers in the UN. And they ask Europe at the G20 meetings to solve it's economic problems as we did some years ago ask them. And they block interventions into "internal" affairs seemed for by the West in the UN .

As result of this structural changes Europe may be marginalized. And that brings new turbulences especially when these countries are not ready to play an active and "constructive" role in the framework of global governance structures.

All these trends speak for a strengthening of Europa and the use of our combined forces to represent our interests. And the speak for close cooperation with all possible partners. But as we have with the USA many interests and values in common this cooperation is especially important.