

The Challenge of Diversity

VIEWED IN THE long term, globalization is simply a process in which a new worldwide civilization is taking shape, brought about as the result (judging by the experience so far) of the global spread of advanced science and technology, and the deepening of genuine economic and social interdependence among all nations.

Unfortunately, this process is often viewed as some kind of worldwide standardization of life, as if everyone would be living in a drably uniform way. It seems to me that such standardization will not happen, that the different nations and nationalities will not be boiled down in a single melting pot. Nor will the specific qualities of each nation and nationality be obliterated. No uniform primitive mentality will arise to take the place of the various kinds of psychology, ways of thinking, inner soul, and character of the various nations and nationalities that have been formed historically. In the words of one of our outstanding Russian historians and thinkers, Mikhail Geffer:

I am convinced that the world that the twentieth century will pass on as a legacy to the twenty-first will not be the world of a single humanity toward whose creation the previous centuries have striven in one way or another. It will be a *world of worlds*, living side by side and interacting, with a mutual interest in preserving life-giving differences. Differences will become the meaning and purpose of human activity, if you will, a decisive factor in the survival of the species *Homo* . . . This is new. This is untested. But really there can be no other way.

The dialectical process by which world unity is coming about while diversity is simultaneously increasing is one of the most complicated but

real and urgent subjects for research concerning global development. We cannot fail to point out that, in parallel with expanding globalization, the number of independent states is multiplying before our eyes. An ever increasing number of nations and nationalities are expressing the desire for independence, up to and including the formation of new states—as if to say: Granted it's small and weak, but it's our own country.

Usually this contradictory tendency is explained by the democratization of life in the international community, the emancipation of nations initially from the fetters of colonialism, later from the chains of ignominious dependence on other countries, and finally from the oppressive burden of confrontation and general Cold War loyalties that placed a tight rein on national aspirations. The peoples of the world are seeking self-identity and independence.

As time passes, will this process end? The World Congress of Geographers predicted in 1992 that the number of new independent states would continue to grow in the future. Independent study of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this work, but it is already clear that the multiplication of independent states is an inevitable result of the globalization process. This is because globalization, which brings about assimilation, coordination, and interdependence among nations and nationalities also forces each entity in this process to defend its own cultural characteristics, its own values and way of life. The process of interdependence, therefore, gives rise to both mutual attraction and repulsion. Just as there is interconnectedness, so too there is a certain mutual drawing of lines of demarcation.

The movement of the human community toward interdependence requires each participant to correct certain unique behaviors, adapt to the requirements of global markets, and subordinate themselves to certain universal imperatives. This means that the familiar conditions of existence are rapidly evolving. Participants are forced to change long-established customs and traditions and to revise their value systems. Of course this pressure is perceived or responded to differently. Some people become accustomed to the flood of change, whereas others feel they have fallen into the clutches of outside forces, even hostile forces, forces that threaten to tear them away from centuries-old cultural traditions. These forces seem to encroach on what is most precious—the identity of a national group, nation, or country. The perception of this threat leads to an instinctive opposition to globalization processes—or, more exactly, to their concrete manifestations. From this also arises a desire to take refuge from these oncoming

changes by withdrawing into one's traditional niche, whether national, religious, or other.

In these times the phenomenon of aggressive nationalism has been triggered by a combination of the reaction against globalization and the desire of nations and nationalities to defend their rights and overcome injustices and restrictions of their rights—a desire that greatly intensified after the end of the Cold War.

The very concept of nationalism varies in different countries and among different nationalities. Often it is interpreted positively—as a desire to preserve and strengthen the uniqueness of one's own nation or nationality, and in such cases this is not objectionable.

However, the new breed of aggressive nationalism has a quite different content. Involved here is speculation by essentially antidemocratic forces that would like to achieve power, influence, and dominance by exploiting national sentiments and to create a kind of nationalist “paradise”—something far removed from the ideals of peace and humanism. It is a paradise that, for most normal people, would be a hell.

Aggressively nationalist forces exploit the idea of defending the rights and sovereignty of their nations, but in fact they prevent their own people's full enjoyment of their rights and sovereignty. Under present conditions, and especially under the conditions that will exist in the future, it will be possible to realize national rights and sovereignty only by considering the interdependence of nations and the absolute necessity of cooperation with other countries and with a world that rules out hostility and intolerance.

Another often troublesome trend, apart from aggressive nationalism, is “hyper-ethnicism.” This harmful trend may combine with aggressive nationalism, but it can also be entirely “benign” (although that makes it no less dangerous). It is expressed in the desire to eliminate the multinational states that have taken shape historically and to create “ethnically pure” states. In discussing this phenomenon, it should be emphasized that the right of nations to self-determination is a natural right recognized by the international community. The International Covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights adopted by the United Nations on December 16, 1966, states in its first article: “All nations have the right to self-determination. By virtue of this right they freely establish their own political status and freely decide their own economic, social, and cultural development.”

In other words, the right of nations to self-determination is no different from the right to freedom of choice, which is defended by the new thinking.

And when a nation unambiguously expresses its desire to exercise this right to self-determination, it is immoral—to say the least—to try to hinder it. For any nation, however, it is in that nation's own interests, when determining the ways and means for implementing this right, to consider a fairly broad range of circumstances that would be disastrous to ignore. Above all, few nations, and even fewer small administrative territories, are ethnically homogeneous. So when one ethnic community exercises its right to self-determination, it is very easy for this action to restrict the rights of another ethnic community. This is soil in which conflicts grow, conflicts that can become extremely severe and cause instability.

Furthermore, in cases where exercising the right to self-determination leads to the dissolution of a traditionally multinational state, the heirs of this state encounter a great many problems in “dividing up the inheritance,” in addition to purely ethnic problems—so many problems that only in exceptional cases are they solved painlessly. Most often they cause relations between the separating parties to become clouded or embittered not just for years but for many decades.

The splitting of existing state structures into new states inevitably results in economic instability. To ensure the viability of the new structures is not a simple task—after all, economic complexes that had been built up over a long time are being torn apart. Often the new states fall into the orbit of other larger, more powerful states that treat them as loot to be plundered.

All these considerations, derived from historical experience, have been tragically and convincingly confirmed in recent years in the former Yugoslavia. All the negative consequences of hasty, poorly thought-out decisions that were supported no less hastily by foreign governments have appeared there. The common result of these decisions has been a long, drawn-out war that has brought countless catastrophes to the nations and nationalities of that country.

The fate of the Soviet Union is another example; its fragmentation into fifteen independent states was not preceded by the necessary planning and well thought-out measures and led to many negative consequences. Among them was the appearance in all cases of new national minorities although, properly speaking, *minority* may not be the proper term, because in some cases millions of people were involved and were comparable in number to the native population. There have also been attempts at “ethnic cleansing,” violations of human rights, and so forth.

The problem is not limited to these two examples. No part of the world

is free of “hyper-ethnic” tendencies in one form or another—for example, ethnic disruptions have occurred in China, India, Turkey, Spain, Canada, and Belgium. It is difficult to imagine the chaos that would erupt in the world if the desire for ethnic (or ethno-religious) isolation—the wish to separate one or another minority from an existing state structure—were to take the form of real measures to redraw the borders of existing states. This would not be a path toward better organization but a step backward toward universal disorganization of the human community.

The way out of this situation might be a carefully considered application of the principle of *federalism* in the broadest sense of the term. This principle offers the possibility of ensuring the rights and interests of individual nations, nationalities, and ethnic groups and also preserves all the advantages of the existing larger state structures. For example, the preservation of the Soviet Union in the form of a renewed federation (even with elements of a confederated structure) undoubtedly would have given each of the component nations the possibility of ensuring its own rights and would also have preserved the advantages of a large economic, legal, cultural, and military space. A federation would have helped avoid all the major difficulties and losses that all the components of the former Soviet Union are encountering today.

In certain cases—if conditions allowed—positive results might be achieved by applying the principle of national-cultural autonomy.

Generally, then, the right of nations to self-determination is indisputable, but it should not be incontrovertible. The question of the forms and methods by which self-determination is achieved deserve the closest attention, as well as flexible, cautious, and historically justified approaches.

Of course a question with still no generally accepted answer is how to balance universally recognized human rights with the rights of minorities, the rights of nations to self-determination, and the sovereignty of nations.

Considering the new legal standards that have emerged, the existence of unified structures embracing many nations, and both the interdependence and the growing multiplicity of the international community, we must contemplate a substantial revision of the concepts currently operating in the world. This, of course, can be accomplished only by collective efforts, and the results must be recognized by the entire international community.

Thus the simultaneous emergence of globalization and increased diversity in the international community, as well as the interdependence and mutual influences of these processes, are facts of life that cause many highly

complicated problems. The problems occur in the domestic life of various nations, often impacting a nation's very destiny, as well as on the international level. Naturally opinions vary regarding this matter. For example, Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History*, advances an idea that is popular in the West, namely, that liberalism was victorious in the Cold War and that the socialist idea was completely defeated; he then envisages the most extreme form of liberal values and the liberal mentality extended to the whole world. The ideal liberal model for him, of course, is American society and its values. This fairly clear assertion allows no alternative to the inevitable subordination of all nations to a single model with a monopoly on the truth, that is, melting all of humanity in the same old liberal pot.

History has already known attempts to act on the basis of a monopoly on the truth—such as the attempt to ordain for all of humanity a transition to socialism based on the Soviet totalitarian model. It is well known how that ended. And no doubt Fukuyama's pretensions will end in the same kind of grand finale. Indeed, even the Western world, in its present form, rejects any kind of single model—more exactly, the American model—as the only one. In advanced Western society each country has its own forms and methods for carrying out liberal ideas and using the mechanisms of the market economy and pluralist democracy. This alone refutes Fukuyama's predictions.

In his subsequent major work, *Trust*, he presents additional arguments in support of his basic thesis; for example, he asserts that all countries in the twenty-first century that do not renounce their own national traditions and characteristics, who do not “get married” or at least “become engaged” to what he calls “democratic liberalism” or “capitalism without borders,” are doomed to vegetate.

Fukuyama's theoretical construct also collapses when tested against reality. Most countries since World War II have achieved impressive economic and cultural advances precisely by relying on their own traditions and psychological outlooks, while bowing to the demands of modernization. In some respects, these very countries—for example, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore—have already shown their ability to give the older industrial powers, beginning with the United States, a run for their money. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 dealt a substantial blow to these countries but by no means eliminated their potential for the future.

As for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including those of the former Soviet Union, the application of market mechanisms and pluralist democracy has also been carried out in quite different forms, taking into

account specific national features. Attempts simply to impose ready-made models have ended in blind alleys and have complicated the process of reorganizing society. The people of Russia, in particular, have rejected these attempts as alien to their culture.

Another variation on predictions about development under conditions of globalization and the simultaneous growth of diversity comes from the pen of Samuel P. Huntington. In his work entitled *Clash of Civilizations* he advances the hypothesis of an inevitable conflict in the twenty-first century, an irreconcilable struggle between different civilizations. Essentially he seems to suggest that differences among civilizations inevitably lead to a universal struggle of each against all. A great deal of discussion, mainly critical, has been directed at Huntington's work. Without repeating what others have said on this topic, I believe that certain contradictions and even conflicts between various regions or cultures undoubtedly have occurred over the course of history. But although such problems cannot be ruled out in the future as well, they are hardly as explosive today as Huntington indicates.

The most serious and dangerous clashes today take place not so much between civilizations as within them. This is not surprising: The increased diversity in the international community has led to a unique result—a certain rise in pluralism within regional civilizations and the appearance of new contradictions among different segments of those civilizations. It is enough merely to cite the clashes between certain Arab countries or among differing political currents within each country, as well as bloody conflicts on the African continent and the complicated developments in Southeast Asia.

Another circumstance that cannot be ignored is that the current conflicts between different civilizations have resulted not so much from differences among them as from social factors, including the legacy of the colonial past, the widening gap in levels of development between countries or groups of countries, and the unequal legal status of immigrants (especially immigrants who went from developing countries to developed countries). This latter factor could, in the coming century, be a detonator of many conflicts.

Thus neither the hypothesis of a universal leveling out to meet the standards of liberalism nor an inevitable conflict of civilizations can be considered indisputable. Does this mean, then, that the dialectics of globalization and diversity, the challenge of diversity itself, will not entail complications? Absolutely not! But the factors underlying these complications are more subjective than objective and seek either to exploit objective differences or speculate on them.

I am mainly referring here to policies that ignore regional differences among civilizations, ignore national interests, and disregard specific national features of countries and populations. After all, any variant of hegemonism [policies aimed at imposing the hegemony of one country or bloc], any relapse into colonialism, any attempt to impose a particular model on all other countries or to establish worldwide “leadership” by any one power discounts the national interests of other countries. Thus far, only certain American politicians have expressed pretensions to the role of leadership on a world scale, but there are proponents of such ideas on the regional level.

The conclusion is obvious: Any policy that seeks to be democratic, humane, and responsive to the interests both of the country pursuing that policy and the world as a whole must carefully consider the specific features of world regions and regional civilizations as well as the national interests and specific features of each country and each nation.

There is no need to demonstrate that the interests of various countries and peoples differ, sometimes quite substantially; this is normal and natural. In this connection, one of the principle of the new thinking must show the way: the search for a balance of interests, a balance that establishes the extent to which one or another country may be able to take a certain action.

An important aspect of this problem is the interpretation of the term *national interests*. Surely the national interests of a country are often interpreted incorrectly. History—including modern history—reveals many cases in which the desire for unlimited hegemony has been presented as being in a country’s “national interest.” Or a desire to dominate a certain region, or to declare another sovereign state or group of states to be in one’s “zone of strategic interest.” Such an approach reveals a lack of moderation and is impermissible.

Clearly a particular region’s situation might affect the interests of a neighboring country, even a distant country, and force that country to pay close attention to the state of affairs in that region and possibly take measures to defend its own interests. But in no case should it violate the sovereignty of its partners or its neighbors.

Another erroneous interpretation of a country’s national interests may be expressed in a desire for isolation, for a kind of economic, political, or spiritual autarchy. In an interdependent world, the genuine interests of any country—as I have said—depend on its using the advantages of international intercourse in the broadest sense.

Essentially any inaccurate approach, any kind of distortion—either exaggeration or underestimation—in the interpretation of one’s national interests, ultimately ends in failure in both domestic and foreign policy.

An obvious question, however, is who should act as judge. Who has the right to decide whether a particular country’s national interests have been defined correctly? I think the judge in this case must be the country’s own people. It is in their sense of responsibility and wisdom that the correct interpretation lies. And even though people may be influenced and misled, eventually they become aware of their true interests.

The Italian scholar and politician Sergio Romano, in his book *The Factory of Wars*, expresses the profound thought that conflicts and wars, as a rule, have erupted when one or more states have mistakenly interpreted their own national interests, including, and this is often primary, the interests of their own national security.

Today such mistaken interpretations are especially dangerous. In an interconnected world, any error, especially one made by a great power, can resonate throughout the world and create crises far more damaging than ever occurred in the past.