

Europe in the Mirror of Globalization: Problems, Challenges and Perspectives

26-27 May, 2006

Jurmala

Sessions Description

In May 2006, the Baltic Forum held its annual conference in Jurmala, Latvia. Europe in the process of globalization was the main focus of the event. Globalization constitutes a special challenge for Europe, where increased global interactions overlap with the unparalleled process of European integration. The different aspects of "European globalisation" were discussed in four main sessions outlined below.

The New Contours of Global Security: Redrawn Chessboard, Clash of Civilisations or Terra Incognita?

Although the conference was focus on the specific European perspective on globalization, this session was look at the broader context of worldwide change that affects all societies and countries. Dealing with globalization for the European Union does not only mean coping with its effects locally, in Europe proper. The united Europe is an increasingly self-conscious global player that, together with other actors, strives to shape the course of global development. Not just the EU, however, but also the US, Russia, China and other great powers are searching for answers to multiple new risks and uncertainties.

Global security threats such as terrorism and proliferation of nuclear weapons have clear sources and the need to cooperate to deal with these threats is obvious. At the same time, new security concerns related to economic sustainability are emerging. At the root of this kind of security concerns is the fact that natural resources, especially energy resources, are limited. The issues of energy security and security of energy supplies have the potential for cementing partnerships between key players, but they could also create rivalries and attempts to use limited resources as an instrument of pressure.

The 21st century promises to be turbulent, while the contours of future global security remain vague. Will it be a redrawn chessboard where actors new and old struggle for influence, power and world leadership? Or are new risks and uncertainties so diverse and unclear that the boundaries of the geopolitical world map will be becoming ever more blurred, creating a new terra incognita?

The events of the last few years pose questions about the implications of unprecedented military and economic power of the United States. One school of thought holds that the American leadership is necessary in order to effectively fight the threats of global terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to promote and defend democracy and stability worldwide. Critics point to the dangers of a leadership degenerating into a diktat, of double standards in international politics and of retreat from basic Western norms and values. What is the real measure of American global influence, and how will it change in the future? Will the new global turbulence bring the main players closer to each other? Will China, India, Russia and other countries, either separately or jointly, challenge the leading role of the US in the world?

Actors and Objects of the European Integration: Who Governs in the 21st Century Europe? Who Bears the Burden of Responsibility?

Globalization changes the old power patterns and questions the role and future fate of the nation state. The pressures of the global economy and multiculturalism on the ordinary citizens are growing; the citizens demand effective answers to these pressures, but from whom? On the one hand, the nation state no longer has a monopoly on problem-solving; neither can it count on unconditional loyalty from its citizens. On the other hand, the power of and support for the supranational institutions of the EU is limited. Will the European integration and globalization ultimately lead to the weakening of the nation state? Or, perhaps, on the contrary, the nation state will also in the future remain a unique and irreplaceable structure for societies to exist in?

Are the European countries, small and big, old and new, doomed to go with the stream of globalization, or can they actively and deliberately influence and guide this process? What do a 'strong society' and a 'strong state' mean in the 21st century Europe? Who steers the societal processes and who takes the responsibility? How realistic is the idea of a 'global society', or a united 'European society'?

National Identities Face Cultural Globalization: Self-assertion, Conflicts and Search for Harmony

Global channels of communication, migration, mobility of capital and technology create new cultural spaces, changing the constitution of societies and rendering them open to new cultures and different values. This makes uncertain the validity and sustainability of the traditional values and ways of life. The reaction to this pressure of cultural globalization is a feeling of insecurity and an increasing desire to re-assert the traditional cultural, national, and local identities.

The multicultural nature of the European societies poses the question about the limits to tolerance and cultural dialogue. For how long can European democracies accommodate values and ways of life that contradict their very essence, and yet remain democracies? Will the clash of cultures alien to each other lead to dialogue, mutual enrichment, or, on the contrary, to conflicts or even 'civilization wars'? How can societies adapt to the challenges of cultural globalization and multiculturalism? Is it realistic to put trust in a search for harmony in the polyphony of cultures, languages and values? What resources are available in societies to generate such positive development?

European Integration: A Benchmark Achievement or an Air Castle?

More than half a century has passed since the birth of the European Union. Since then, it has provided a unique experience of dealing with the pressures of globalization on a regional scale. These days, however, the Europeans increasingly raise the question: How successful has the European integration project been? What is its future? Do the difficulties experienced by the European Union today point at the problematic nature and the limitations of European integration?

While the European elites welcome more integration and more globalization, the populations seem to be increasingly sceptical, nervous and even frustrated in the face of these trends. A fight is going on over the future of Europe. Some want a united Fort Europe unassailable to the tides of globalization. Others dream of a return to a Europe of sovereign nations. Yet there is also a different vision: A Europe that is a moral and economic leader of a humane globalization on a global scale. Is this vision realistic? Can the EU reconcile the forward-looking aspirations of its elites with the hopes of the ordinary European citizens? Can it make globalization serve the interests of people and societies?

It is obvious that the European Union does not cover the whole of Europe. How could the 'European project' also attract the parts of Europe outside the Union, especially Russia? Does Russia see its answer to globalization in the context of ever closer cooperation with the EU? How will Russia's security, military and energy cooperation with China, India and the countries of Middle East influence its relations with the European Union?