

**Prof. Mihály Simai**  
Director of Advanced International  
Economic and Business Studies.  
IWEHAS.Budapest

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## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CRITICAL TRENDS OF THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

The issues of sustainable development, in the center of which is the concept of intergenerational responsibility for the future of the world can be analyzed in a narrower and in a broader framework. This short paper is looking at the opportunities and problems in the broader framework.

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> is a rare coincidence of „transformations” evolving in a number of critical areas of global development, in population trends, politics, economics, technology, environment and governance.<sup>2</sup> The transformations include and influence politics, economy demographic processes, population growth, de-ruralization, urban growth, major structural changes in societies and in the economy, radical changes in technological and production base, in the organization of production and the markets, in entrepreneurship, in employment and the international division of labor. It is too early to get a well elaborated scientifically sound answer to the question: “how the combined and cumulative influence of those changes will transform our globe?”

1.The process of global political transformation has two main dimensions. One of it is the end of territorial empires; the growing number of states and the increasing political diversity of the globe represent an other dimension. The present era marks the conclusion of an approximate 500 year period of great empires, its precise terminus being the collapse of the Soviet Union, The growing number of states has important consequences for the sustainability of global and regional security. There is a third dimension of the political transformations, the growing importance of the civil society and grassroots politics.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a recent book of the speaker :”The Age of Global Transformations. The Human Dimensions” .Academia Publisher, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> Transformation can be understood as a process that modify the characteristics and the functioning of human society in the majority of the countries or of the biosphere. It may include gradual, sudden, reversible or irreversible, quantitative and qualitative components. Transformations can be deliberate and spontaneous. They can be considered as attempts of human society to deal with the challenges but also spontaneous reactions in different areas. They are however seldom pre-meditated, well designed organized and harmonized changes .

2. The process of globalization, which I consider as a new stage of internationalization, is a centrally important concentration of transformations. Many scholars consider it as the main source of problems or opportunities. It is however both a "cause" and a "consequence" of transformations in different areas. The growing interdependence and interactions between the different actors, functional areas and problems of the international system blended local, national and international dynamics in a historically unprecedented way. Societies are changing, practically in all the dimensions of their functioning. The process and its consequences reshuffle the societies the hierarchies of the countries in wealth and power. It is bringing about qualitative changes also in the political, military, cultural and institutional dimensions of human life. The different dimensions of globalization change also under the influence of a number of factors. Disintegration and fragmentation which are also influencing the changes and they are often interrelated with the consequences of globalization are often disregarded. This is an important methodological and conceptual error, particularly from human development perspective. Integration is connected more with the interests and values of the beneficiaries of globalization; fragmentation is often the result of the efforts of the losers, whose number is quite large. The simultaneous effects of both trends are resulting in political and economic, social and psychological discontinuities as well as new evolving factors and continuities. All these are making the process of change complex and difficult to conceptualize.

3. Transformation in population and gender dynamics is a vitally important dimension of the transformations. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will witness the conclusion of an epoch in population trends, which started with the industrial revolution and were characterized by the acceleration in the increase of the population on the globe. According to the UN and other demographic projections, by the year of 2050 the world will reach most probably the stage of demographic stability at the level of 8-9 billion. The process of demographic transformation is a globally diverse change. One of its consequences is the growing demographic polarization. An other very important long-term consequence of the demographic transition will be the transforming age composition of the population, which in itself has a number of consequences for all the societies. The changing demographic aspects of employment are also difficult political, social and economic issues. One other important consequence of the changing population dynamics is the pressure for migration. This is also an era, when the process of the global emancipation of women accelerated and it will have major social and economic consequences.

4. The challenges of a globalized urban world are partially related to the changing population dynamism, partly comprise a specific dimension of the changes. The urban transition process in the developing world has been also characterized as de-ruralization. It includes urbanization and the disintegration of the traditional rural life. As the result of the massive urban migration, the era of global urban transition will be by and large concluded within 25 years. Megacities are emerging. The predominantly urban world will function in a different way.

5. The process of transition to a new technological era transforms the functioning of the global economy, society and creates new security challenges. There will be new opportunities and problems and with increasing gaps between countries and between the winners and the losers. It is closely related to the ecological changes.

6. The transformation of the global economy and the related social changes comprise probably the most complex, uncertain and unpredictable components of the new era. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the value of the global product expressed in US dollars is over 40 trillion

in ppp terms. It was 6 trillion in 1950. The main source of growth has been the service economy. The global economy has split into the real economy and the paper economy. There have been major structural changes in both main areas, in production and consumption. New interactions developed between production, trade and investments. Liberalization became a major source of these new interactions. The economic transformation process resulted in new sources of economic growth for many countries, decline and stagnation for others. The spatial transformation of the global economy, the new economic geography of the globe and its implications together with the transformation of the different communities and the increasing differences in income and wealth comprise also major aspects of the changes. In a simplified way one can identify three main groups of the world population which has emerged as the consequence of the economic and social changes in the era of globalization: those of globalized, those of the marginalised and the „in-betweens”.

7. The transformation of the state system and the new role of governments represent also a complex area. Every state is embedded in a society it governs and it is closely linked to and penetrated by social forces. Within the countries the state does not exist in a political or power vacuum. It is a reflection of the balance of power within the society. All these influence the state in defining and fulfilling its functions. The countries are embedded in an international environment, in which their relations to other states could be governed by unilateral actions, reciprocities, and different degree of interdependence, friendship or animosity.

8 among the non-military factors that endanger global security, 'environmental' issues have become of key importance in the last stage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The increasing awareness of such risks as stratospheric ozone depletion, global warming, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, pollution, and many others has resulted in major changes on the agenda of international risk and conflict management and cooperation. The ecological transformation of earth, which is a main topic of this conference, is related to different aspects of economic, social, technological and political changes. It is well known that the future of human development depends ultimately on the life-sustaining capacity of the Earth. Human survival requires that various bio-geo-chemical parameters of the global ecosystem, of the 'media' in which human development takes place, should be sustained. Thus environmental sustainability is the bedrock of human economic and social development. The improvement of the life sustaining capacity of earth requires different societal actions. Education, health, employment, regional and local development, natural resource management, infrastructure and the eradication of poverty will be particularly important. The poor countries are in many case victims of environmental degradation, before becoming the sources of it. The geopolitics of sustainable development represents a very important aspect of the problems: who is responsible, who is going to pay whose life supporting system is endangered or ruined? Affluence, as well as poverty, is a major cause of environmental degradation. Most people want to get richer and possess and use more things. About 10 per cent of the world population currently consume some 75 per cent of the world's resource production. In 1998, the top 20 per cent of the world population, in the highest-income countries, accounted for 86 per cent of total spending on individual

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the main concerns of students of international relations have traditionally been power, conflict, and cooperation. Power and power structures, however, are not irrelevant to ecological studies, as certain countries do have comparatively more influence than others on the state of the global environment and on environmental policy making. Still, environmental risks and conflicts do differ in many ways from political-military, or even from economic conflicts. Further, the forms and character of risk assessment, risk management, and cooperation in environmental matters are dissimilar to those of traditional socioeconomic or political conflicts.

consumption, while the poorest 20 per cent accounted for only 1.3 per cent.[19] The affluents are major producers of household garbage and industrial toxic waste. They use more chemicals in agriculture and are the sources of massive automotive exhaust fumes. They also use much more water and energy. Their relative contribution to global warming is much greater.

9. The transformation of governance includes global, regional and national components. Its two main tasks are interrelated: how to keep the world together in the light of the critical trends and new challenges and how to strengthen global security. Conflicting interests may hamper the global and regional aspects of the tasks. The only intergovernmental organization with global mandate and with a multifunctional structure is the UN. In order to keep the world together its effectiveness and credibility must be improved. To achieve this goal in a world, the diversity and complexity of which have changed radically since its conception, is an extremely difficult task. The role of different regional organizations in the governance process is an other major question of the future. To what extent can an effective division of labor develop between regional and global security organizations? In the area of strengthening global security, the disappearance of bloc discipline raises also a number of important issues. Are there sufficient incentives and punitive instruments, which can bloc irrational, irresponsible actions? Global governance in this era would require new norms, -enforcing authority and established codes of conduct in many areas. Settling the conditions of humanitarian intervention, preventive intervention their justification and mechanisms in a multilateral framework for example are particularly important tasks.

10. The last issue is related to the broadest framework of global changes, the transformation of the social systems. At the beginning of the new century capitalism became the dominating world system. It has never been homogenous but during almost the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, external forces and factors have influenced it. These ceased to exist by the end of the century. There have been a number of favorable changes related to the collapse of the socialist-atteest regimes like the global spread of democracy and the greater universality of human rights. How will the system develop? Will it be able to sustain the favorable changes? Will global capitalism become more equitable internally and externally? Will a world market develop with a human face? Will the world become more peaceful than in the past century? At this point the chances are that at least the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for the majority of the population of the world will continue to be a turbulent and difficult time, with unsettled economic and social problems and political instability. The irrational prophecies of fundamentalism, the different cohorts of violent nationalism and terrorism, irresponsible and shortsighted policies of certain governments represent important global and regional risk factors. The tasks related to the strengthening global security in this era would be even more important in all of its dimensions and levels.