

THE GLOBALISATION AND THE MULTITUDE OF ITS CONTRADICTORY INTERPRETATIONS

Boghean Carmen

Boghean Florin

Faculty of Economic Sciences and Public Administration, University of Suceava, University Street, no.9, 720225, Romania, Phone: ++040230520263, Fax: ++040230520263, carmenb@seap.usv.ro, florinb@seap.usv.ro

The globalisation is a long-debated topic, omnipresent in the media discourse, in the specialty literature, and also in the daily conversations. The opinions expressed on this set of processes that mark all the aspects of our life are often antagonist; that is why, for a better understanding of the globalisation, we need to make a personal and objective analysis. The globalisation phenomenon is one of the most controversial topics of discussion, both in the academic and business environments, as well as for the regular citizen. As specialists or mere observers, we all feel the globalisation effects, one way or another.

Keywords: globalisation process, technological progress, human society, globalisation critics.

JEL CLASIFICATION: F02

Introduction

Globalization is likely to represent the vastest in scope and most widely discussed phenomenon. The interest in this topic is very high due to the effects it has within the ranks of the companies, of the states and of the common people. The globalisation is not solely a destructive force, as the sceptics sustain, but a phenomenon that has the capacity to improve the economic performances and the daily life of each of us. The difficulty of approaching such a controversial topic derives precisely from the vast preoccupation with the effects implied by this phenomenon.

Globalisation is a reality of the contemporary world engendering inter-connected manifestations and repercussions at all the levels of the human activity – the economic, political, cultural, scientific and ecological levels. The term in itself is very fashionable, its use being often rhetorical. Already turned into a cliché, the term bears different meanings, according to the one defining it in a particular context.

Throughout time, the globalisation has been defined in different ways, according to the purpose of its use, there existing diverse nuances. At present, there is no such thing as an all comprehensive and incontestable definition of the concept.

Beyond all the controversies the phenomenon of globalisation gives rise to, there is one certain thing: we are witnessing an extremely complex phenomenon, which determines an increase in the interdependencies between all the world economic entities and which, implicitly, affects all of us. The purpose of globalisation must be to insure an environment which is adequate to the evolution of the international system, to the equity, security, transparency, as well as to an improved global governing, meant to ensure a larger distribution of opportunities and the inclusion of the marginalised ones.

The greatest danger for a new concept is to be turned into a cliché, into a stereotypical formula; to put it differently, into a sum of common places which substitute themselves to the lively, real process, failing to seize and render its complexity and evolution. From that moment on, the process of wearing out of meaning for the notion in question and for the interest it had given rise to is only a matter of time.

1. It is globalisation a cliché?

The cliché encompasses distinctive aspects, in the same formula; that is why it gives the impression that it is explanatory; in reality, it gives way to confusion. The substance of the new

cliché comes from common perceptions which, once joined, do not offer a real view on the process we are talking about nor on the forces nourishing its evolution. Such common perceptions are as follows: we live into a fast-changing world under the impact of the technological progress; what is taking place in a region at one point in time, will have, sooner or later, an influence on other regions of the world; the evolution of nowadays world is taking place on an „American direction” or a direction meeting many American interests; no matter how promising, the contemporary evolution is rather out of control, has something chaotic in it, which does not predict anything good; the national state finds it harder and harder to cope with the problems posed by the globalisation. Each of these sentences contains elements of truth. The problem is that their agglomeration without discernment facilitates a process of amalgamation which does not help us to clarify things.

The globalisation represents an essential direction of the contemporary development. We deal with an extremely important process; we must discern its complexity and understand its impact on our life. As long as we acknowledge the fact that we are talking about a process that is modelling our existence, there is nothing more dangerous than wearing the cliché glasses when we deal with the globalisation. In this case, we will only notice the problems to which we have access through our own lens dioptries, while the chances of understanding what is happening around us will be close to none.

The cliché does not bear nuances; everything is either black or white. The approach by means of the cliché implicitly leads to simplistic approaches, by virtue of which the globalisation is either an entirely positive process or an entirely negative one. Actually, an essential proof of the use of the cliché in tackling this phenomenon is the fact that, in the specialty literature, there prevail either the hyper-optimistically visions, that induce a toned-down image of the process we deal with, or the approaches painting the globalisation in dark colours, as a source of all the wrongdoings of this time. In the absence of such a necessary process of clarification, the perpetuated meaning of globalisation is the one given by Zygmunt Bauman, who sees it as an undefined, disorganised and self-propelled phenomenon. It is said to be characterised by the „absence of the core, of a control stand, of a decision board, of a managerial board. The globalization is a different name for <the new world disorder>”⁵⁰

The globalisation is seen as an accomplished phenomenon, the different meanings under which the term circulates going unnoticed. Thus, there is created a common space where the globalisation concept circulates with different meanings, generating confusion and misunderstanding. On the other hand, there are very few analyses that regard the phenomenon in its entire scope, which illustrates the fact that the specific research is at a rather involved level. The typical study is the one focused on a specialised domain. To a certain extent, this is a good thing, as this is the only way we can aspire to extensive research meant to synthesise the general tendencies in the evolution of the phenomenon in question. But it is here that a change of meaning occurs. Although centred on a particular domain, the studies detach conclusions for the entire process of globalisation. It is especially the studies done from an economic viewpoint that occupy the debate space on the globalisation theme and „talk” on behalf of the process as a whole. Once set up, such approaches lead to the neglecting of other extremely important problems, raised by the evolution of the globalisation, such as its political, cultural and ecological impact. From any viewing angle we would look at things, the adequate conceptualisation of this process is an imperative need.

2. The Hyperoptimists of the Globalisation Process

In order to judge the globalisation in a balanced way, it is recommendable to attempt to represent to ourselves the greatest interpretations of this process. This is a very important scientific

⁵⁰ Bauman, Z., *Globalizarea și efectele ei sociale*, Editura Antet, București, 2002,p.59.

approach; at the same time, it bears an important psychological connotation, as it is rare that people not embrace avidly a new phenomenon they cannot comprehend clearly. The specialty literature distinguishes three great approaches of this process, three interpretations of great social impact. There are the authors who talk about globalization as of an accomplished phenomenon, the analysts who manifest a hyper optimism regarding the possibilities and the potential of the new process; and, just as in any other important process, we can also distinguish the opposing trend, the pessimists' one which either minimizes - if not really denies - the advantages of the globalization, or insist on its negative consequences, especially on those of a social order.

Finally, we also encounter a moderate interpretation, characterized by the promotion of a balanced approach where could be found the novelty elements brought about the globalization and also the costly processes it induces. In the specialty literature, the hyperoptimists are also named hyperglobalists. What characterises this orientation is first of all the fact that the years of affirmation of the globalisation are considered to be representing a new era in the evolution of the human society, a completely distinct stage. A stage imposed by new processes, which models our existence more, and more and that we will have to take into account more and more in the organisation of our social activity. Which would be the defining traits of this new stage?

The triumph of the global market, which essentially modifies the classical rules of the international economical and political game. The global market means the extension of the competitive rules at the world level. There are several factors facilitating this process: the disappearance or the important reduction of the customs barriers and the diminishing of the transport costs. This way, the producers in a region can compete with the internal producers in another region or, to put it differently, „the demand and supply of goods functions more and more at a global level: the companies provide goods all over the world and must face the competition from the foreign companies”⁵¹

The hyperglobalists promote an economical prospect, reason by virtue of an economic logistic, which they consider fundamental in nowadays world. The coronation of this vision: a “boundless world”, a global market which has been set up or is on the point of being set up. In such a world, the national governments play a limited part, the part of „drive belts” for the international capital, of „intermediate institutions” crashed between the local, regional and global requirements. By virtue of these interpretations, the fundamental tendency of the age we are crossing is the denationalisation, the nation states being nothing else but „a transitory way of organisation for the administration of the economic problems”⁵²

The new stage the hyperglobalists are talking about also generates a new pattern of losers and winners. The North-South divide is no longer relevant. The reality of the contemporary world illustrates a much more complex architecture. It is marked, among others, by the rise of new states which traditionally belonged to the developing countries (to the South) and which took or are about to take a leap into the category of the developed states (to the North). This process was made possible by the intelligent revaluation of the new economic context, by the use of the globalisation flows in the interest of one's own development. Nobody denies the fact that we are dealing with a pronounced polarization between losers and winners. But, in many interpretations, this is not a rule; it is not necessarily a game amounting to nil. Once more, the emphasis is laid on training, on the states' or regions' availability to take advantage of the new forces of the globalisation, to order their own strategies according to a radically changed economic reality.

Beyond the authors' peculiarities or the approaches stemming from different ideological inspirations, the globalisation is seen as a new age of the human society, where everything is

⁵¹ Held, D., et comp., *Transformări globale – Politică, economie și cultură*, Editura Polirom, București, 2004, p.180.

⁵² Ohmae, K., *The End of the Nation State*, Publishing by Free Pr, United States, 1995, p.149.

changing - not only the state and the governments, and „the framework of the human action” as such is redefined.⁵³

3. Sceptics of the globalisation process

Lately, there has been an increase in the number of the works dwelling, in a critical manner, on the process of globalisation, pointing out either to the unfounded character of many of its assertions, either to its negative social consequences. „The more we have examined the problem, the more superficial and unfounded the assertions of the most radical advocates of the economic globalisation have become”⁵⁴. That is why the quoted paper is pervaded by a „moderate scepticism” that takes the shape of a here and there vehement questioning of the globalisation, at least as it appears „in the view of its most extremist followers”. The authors even express their conviction that the globalisation „is but a myth”.

1. The current economy, so much internationalised, is not without precedent: it is one of the numerous distinct climates or stages of the international economy, since the moment of appearance of the modern economy based on the development of the industrial technology, widely spread since 1860. To some regards, the current economy is less open and integrated than the regime that prevailed between 1870 and 1970.

2. The authentic transnational companies are relatively rare. The majority of the companies are national companies that are involved in the international trade, having an important national location of the assets, productions and sales, so we cannot notice an apparent tendency of development of the real international companies.

3. The capital mobility does not produce a massive investment migration and a massive migration of labour from the advanced countries to the developing ones. What we notice here is a greater concentration of direct foreign investments (DFI) within the ranks of the advanced industrial economies, while the Third World remains marginalised both regarding the investments and the trade, with the exception of a small minority of recently industrialised states.

4. As even a part of the globalisation extremist sustainers acknowledge, the world economy is far from being really „global”. Most of the trade, of the investments and of the financial flows are concentrated in the triad Europe-Japan-North America, and this domination is not likely to cease too soon.

5. These major economic powers have, consequently, the capacity, especially when they coordinate policies, to exert powerful governing pressures over the financial markets and over other economic tendencies. The global markets are thus situated, without any doubt, beyond any regulation and control, although the preoccupations and objectives of the economic governing are limited by the divergent interests of the great powers, the economic doctrines prevailing within their élites.

From an analytical point of view, Hirst and Thompson are trying to introduce some order in a pronounced chaotic debate, proposing delineation between two notions considered as essential: globalised economy and inter-national economy. Actually, these concepts express the two meanings of the notion of globalisation: the powerful meaning, radical, fixed by the notion of globalised economy, and the weaker meaning that coincides with what the author names inter-national economy. Even if the above-mentioned notions can also exist in a „disordered combination”, the authors consider that the installing of the conceptual framework proposed by them could shed light in a confused and more and more redundant discussion.

The distinction between the two concepts stems from the different role allotted to the state in the two visions. In the inter-national economy, the state maintains very important prerogatives and leads the process of opening the national economy to the international one. We can say that the

⁵³ Albrow, M., *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford University Press, Chicago, 1996, p.85.

⁵⁴ Hirst, P., Thompson, G., *Globalizarea sub semnul întrebării*, Editura Trei, București, 2002, p. 17.

state is in itself an actor of globalisation, assumes this role and attempts to minimise the costs. It will be preoccupied with stimulating trade and foreign investments, seen as modalities of intensification of the relations between the distinct national economies.

The more the international actors become numerous, the more the national specialisation and international divide impose themselves as forms of adjustment to an extremely dynamic reality. In the last analysis, the state's role is to assimilate the requirements of the globalisation process, but this appears not as something imposed, but, on the contrary, as something assumed, as a victory condition. This is the main characteristic of the inter-national economy: the existence of an active state in the administration of the national problems and also in the spirit and sense of the globalisation processes. That is why, the authors underline: „The antonym of a globalised economy is not an economy oriented towards the interior, but an open world market, based on trading nations, regulated more or less by the public policies and the supranational agencies”⁵⁵

Another characteristic of the same economy: the existence of a superpower meant to organise the international activity in a certain way, to create the organisms of cooperation and opening towards the world. This role was fulfilled by England in the first period of assertion of the international economy (1870-1914), by the USA in the second period, marked by the end of the last world conflagration. Its pillories are: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Organisation of Trade, all of them created on the initiative of the USA with the purpose of stimulating cooperation and of preventing processes of national closure.

The globalised economy implies a gathering and a subordination of the processes that took place at a national level, even their deregulation by virtue of the logic implied by the global market. That is why the state bears a smaller and smaller importance, its role being undertaken by the multinational companies, which become essential economic actors. The global market and its logic are the ones dictating in this economy, the market being little sensitive to the social problems. „The global markets cannot be controlled and the only way to avoid failure, as a nation, company or person, is to be as competitive as possible”⁵⁶ Competitiveness is the supreme law of the new stage and it must subsume everything.

The global organisms the new economy should benefit can take into account only the economic criterion, of competitiveness and performance. The sceptical orientation is, in our opinion, a moment of real awareness: a reaction to the uncritical enthusiasm, to the premature acclaim of „global realities”. This is the orientation in which we must read the sceptical position, if we desire to have a reasonable approach and to destroy its advantages. It appears as a kind of protest to the address of the hyperglobalism exaggerations, using its real vulnerabilities. Nobody can deny that there were really thriving periods of trade and exchanges, as was the one in 1860 until the beginning of World War I. The sceptics' positions to this respect seem to be even better expressed by Gellner and Breuilly, who mentions: when it comes to globalisation, the XXth century ends on a déjà-vu tone: the economies of the world are just as interdependent nowadays as they were in 1913.⁵⁷

The big mistake of the sceptics is that, in their tentative to show that mankind does not go through a globalist age; they do not orient their attention to the new elements that appear in the evolution of the society. Thus, their attitude is somehow bookish, inspired by a critical attitude towards the specialty literature, and not by a careful reading of nowadays' world realities. The sceptics miss the really revolutionary technical changes lying at the basis of the new globalisation age, and do not manifest a real availability to examine the phenomena and process appeared in the last years. Their purpose seems to be that of showing that the hyperglobalists' basic

⁵⁵ Idem, p.36.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p.22.

⁵⁷ Gellner, E., Breuilly, J., *Nations and Nationalism - New Perspectives on the Past*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2009.

statements lack consistency, which may be true. In our turn, we consider that many positions expressed by the hyperglobalists are mainly rhetorical, speaking about a fake reality. The sceptics excel when it comes to identifying facts, situations which contradict the hyperglobalists' basic statements.

Conclusions

What we consider to be new in nowadays process of globalisation are the interwoven consequences brought about by the meeting between new phenomena or between classical ones that go through distinctive qualitative stages of evolution. Consequently, we deal with a new reality, configured by the confluence of certain processes. It is very important to understand the complex nature of globalisation, without which we are unable represent to ourselves the phenomenon and its evolution.

The connexions between different interpretations of the globalisation no longer represent a mere academic debating theme, but are converted into an almost prevailing feeling. Regardless of the way we draw on it, whether we acknowledge or reject it, it represents an element of building our social, political and cultural being. Finally, this gives rise to another interpretation of the globalisation: it is no longer approached as an academic subject, being treated from the viewpoint of its consequences. This change in the receiving process has a precise explanation: the risks that come out from the extension of the globalisation process are not theoretical. This send us to at least two sets of problems, both with a political meaning: the way the globalisation is perceived and which its practical consequences in people's life are. The new process is no longer associated with the „great systems”, but with the daily life; it is no longer somewhere, in the distance, but accompanies our own existence, influencing it.

References:

1. Albrow, M., *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Chicago, 1996, p.85
2. Bauman, Z., *Globalizarea și efectele ei sociale*, Editura Antet, București, 2002,p.59
3. Gellner, E., *Nations and Nationalism - New Perspectives on the Past*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2009, p.116
4. Held, D., et al., *Transformări globale – Politică, economie și cultură*, Editura Polirom, București, 2004, p.180
5. Hirst, P., Thompson, G., *Globalizarea sub semnul întrebării*, Editura Trei, București, 2002, p. 17
6. Ohmae, K., *The End of the Nation State*, Publishing by Free Press, United States, 1995, p.149.