

The Emerging New World System and the European Challenge

ATTILA ÁGH



Politics in Central Europe (ISSN 1801-3422)

Vol. 20, No. 1

DOI: 10.2478/pce-2024-0006

Abstract: *In the early 2020s we live in the transition period between two world systems, the Old World Order (OWO) and the New World Order (NWO), in a deep 'polycrisis'. Therefore, the term transformation has recently appeared in official EU documents as well as in political science literature. The transition to the NWO has begun with this crisis management and it will produce a radical transformation of the entire global architecture in the 2020s. In its conceptual framework this paper focuses on the contrast between 'de-coupling' and 'de-risking', as it has been explained very markedly in the recent speeches of the president of the European Commission, Ursula van der Leyen (EC 2023a), and the national security adviser, Jake Sullivan (The White House 2023). This contrast symbolises the US policy, concentrating more on cutting or reducing connectivity among the various policy fields, versus the EU policy turning them safe and interdependent. These approaches represent the US and EU attitude in the emerging New World Order, and primarily in their relationships to China.*

Keywords: *New World Order, polycrisis, complexity management, multilateral securitisation, global and social citizenship*

Turning from the US-based GDP to the EU-based SDG (sustainable development)

After the collapse of the Soviet empire, the Bipolar World Order (BWO) ended and the Old World Order (OWO) began, while the New Great Transformation (NGT) has recently meant the transition from the Old World Order (OWO) to the New World Order (NOW). Since the pandemic and the Ukrainian war have provoked

a full-blown transformation as the current systemic change in the global world. The first result is ‘the new past’, which includes rewriting the history of the OWO. Everything happened in a different way as was stated before, because the OWO became unsustainable and produced a complex crisis in a polycrisis. Despite this deep crisis, a narrow-minded ‘realpolitik’ dominated in the OWO for a long time, but after the failed management of the global fiscal crisis in the late 2000s, it became clear that the neoliberal globalisation and the ensuing polycrisis (WEF 2023b, 2023c) had to be overcome. In the mid-2010s the *dual* – socio-economic and climate – global crisis management began, and due to the pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, a complex security crisis has also emerged. Thus, in the early 2020s the transition period to the NWO has been entered, and this new *triple* global crisis has been identified in its full complexity. The former approach in the management of global financial crisis in the late 2000s was a deep failure, and it has led to a discussion about ‘the new past’ and to the strategic innovations by the reconceptualisation of the world system’s theory. Nowadays, after the discovery of these three waves of crisis in international relations’ theory the most often asked question has been ‘Is the world transitioning to the next era?’ Altogether, at this historical turning point, as a watershed to a new era, the management of the triple crisis has started within the NWO.¹

As to the discovery of the new past, given the efforts of the Biden administration for the return to the dominant, ‘rule-making’ role in the global system (‘back to the leadership’), there has been a renewed debate on the ill-famed Washington Consensus in the US. In fact, the idea and slogan of the Washington Consensus was launched in 1989 at the time as the collapse in the BWO and the emergence of the Pax Americana on the global scene. It goes back to the classic market-centric concept that free trade as the invisible hand of the market always produces national wealth, since allegedly it is the most effective form of policymaking. Uwe Bott has summarised in the current – mostly American – debate that the US and China benefited a lot from the neoliberal globalisation at the price of the environmental destruction and the rising domestic income inequality. In Western Europe this is not so much the case, since it has never followed the extreme ‘rugged individualism’ of the United States, but anyway its results are disappointing worldwide:

So, in the end the Washington Consensus stands and falls over the definition of wealth. The Washington Consensus is predominantly about advancing material wealth and consumerism.... In fact, the Washington Consensus was a ‘negative sum’ game. It ill-defined the meaning of wealth. It helped China and some others to reach new heights of material wealth at the costs of greater, not lesser, oppression and exploitation within their own borders and to the benefit of

1 This paper relies on the world system analyses in my books and papers (Ágh 2019, 2021, 2022a, 2022b).

a very few inside those borders.... To that, one needs to add the global cost of a likely irreversible level of environmental destruction. Plus, there is the cost of one of humanity's greatest accomplishments, free and democratic societies. Unless we are lucky, aside from our own plutocrats, the only real 'winners' are the oligarchs around the world as well as the advocates of global authoritarianism. That is in itself a surreal outcome (Bott 2023: 2).²

However, the recognition of the deep internal contradictions of the OWO in the late 2010s was not enough, since the vast network of the shorter or longer vested interests prevented any relevant changes. The political will and action were missing until the early 2020s, but finally, due to the pandemic and the Russian aggression, the need for imminent action has become evident. After this 'no pain – no gain' situation there has been a consent that the triple global crisis cannot be solved without accepting the 'pain' of the deep transformations, therefore the NGT has turned out to be a creative crisis. The 'first pain' came with the collapse of the former world system in the pandemic and the Ukrainian war, when real, meaningful change began. This has been followed by the real recognition of the necessary/substantial change that has produced the 'second pain', since these fundamental transformations have also caused painful effects in all countries by forcing radical reforms upon them. The first radical systemic change, which was coordinated by the WHO and took place in the early 2020s during the pandemic, was followed by the second wave of changes due to the Ukrainian war. They have produced an extreme vulnerability of global supply chains. First of all, energy security has many geopolitical risks, but global food security has also suffered because of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

These radical transformations as the mainstream efforts have been disturbed or hindered by the many local and regional crises, but they have still remained the dominant megatrend in the global system. After the long painful collapse of the former world order in the 2010s, this positive 'response' to the pandemic and Ukrainian crisis by the global and local reorganisations has also caused many painful effects in all countries by forcing radical reforms upon all social sectors. These 'two pains' in the subsequent stages of the transition period overlap to a great extent, still their contrast is very visible as the pain in the collapse of the old system versus the pain in the building of the new system. The pandemic produced common efforts for the crisis management worldwide, while the Ukrainian war has deeply polarised the world system, still both demanded urgent steps to a new 'rules-based world order' and the first positive results of the radical transformations can already be felt in 2023.³

2 On the globalisation debate see also Cornwall Summit Documents (2021) and EIU (2022b).

3 The Global Risks Report 2022 (WEF 2023a) offers wide explanations for the OWO case analysing the 'climate action failure', 'debt crisis in large economies' and 'employment and livelihood crisis'.

Actually, the OWO ended in the late 2010s with its collapse, and in the early 2020s there has been a reconstruction of the global governance. In this transformation period the theoretical revolution has created a new conceptual framework with new future scenarios (Goldstrom 2022). The necessity of the world-systemic change has become rather clear and manifest, with various terms whirling about, but pointing in the same direction: the former world order is over. The running or turbo-globalisation in the OWO caused deep damages that made this world system unsustainable, first of all by ruining the natural environment. Accordingly, one of the leading policy institutes in Brussels has summarised the situation as follows:

After decades of increasing globalisation in trade, capital and information flows, we are currently experiencing a shift due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine.... Disrupted supply chains, US-China trade tensions and the gradual demise of the WTO appear to be serious threats to globalisation and have altered the geopolitical landscape. Where is globalisation heading? Are we seeing the beginning of a more multipolar world order, one divided between US and Chinese influence? And if so, where does the EU fit in this new scheme? (CEPS 2022).

The first wake-up call already came with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) passed by the UN Assembly on 25 September 2015 and was accompanied by the Paris Agreement on 12 December 2015 in the climate conference. Since these 'global events', *sustainable* development has become the central systemic term, conceived also by the wide-reaching diplomatic network of the United Nations, but represented basically by the European Challenge. In the spirit of 'beyond the GDP', instead of the old, market-based and economy-centred theory, the new concept has embraced the entire complexity of sustainable development elaborating a global, green and knowledge-based strategy. It was already operationalised in 2015 by the UN in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, altogether in 17 SDG index scores and 169 SDG 'targets'. As Gomez-Echeverri notes (2018: 1), the SDGs provide the most comprehensive and balanced global development agenda: 'One of the greatest achievements in the global negotiations of 2015 that delivered the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change is that, for the first time, the linkages between climate and development were enshrined in each of the documents.'⁴

4 The SDG reporting has become mainstream in the global research efforts and its application in strategic planning (UN 2023a, 2023b). The EU has 'Europeanised' this project and this paper focuses on the European version. The SDG approach has been converted by the business world into ESG (Environment, Society and Governance) terms.

In this new global approach, the series of documents have been given names like ‘Preparing for a new global governance’, ‘Pact for the Future’ or ‘The Road to the 2024 UN Summit of the Future’. Many big Brussels-based policy institutes have also convened international conferences in order to discuss the new features of globalisation and the emerging multipolar world order, especially from an EU point of view. The SDG founding document has been followed by regular SDG Reports, also comprising the SDG Index with its rankings for all states. The SDG Reports have become the mainstream effort in the transformation strategy as well as in the elaboration of the new rules-based world order. Accordingly, the SDG in the following years has been extended and described step by step in many ways, and categorised also as the Sustainable Governance Index (SGI) by the Bertelsmann Foundation in its SGI Report on the OECD countries. The survey structure of the SGI Index has two ‘categories’ – policy and political – which allow the full X-raying of all societies. The first category has the three main pillars of economic, political and environmental policies consisting of 6.8 and 2 dimensions, and the second one has another three main pillars of quality of democracy, executive capacity and executive accountability, consisting of 4.8 and 5 dimensions.⁵

This theoretical grid gives a detailed picture of sustainable development inside the OECD countries, with their contacts to the global world acting as an ‘outlook’ to the external factors and with the further ramifications in the national developments. Given their intensive cooperation, the SDG – and on that base the SGI – Reports have been the flagships of the EU for its renewal efforts in this transitory period. The latest reports have already shown the deep changes in the ‘transformation process’ which will be discussed later. Given its complexity focusing on the common management of the triple crisis and the large scale of the 169 SDG targets, the SDG/SGI orientation has become the basic tenet of global politics and policies, as both are for making strategic decisions and elaborating policy instruments. The SDG ‘interim’ Reports indicated the milestones of the global/local transformation and they have been accompanied at all significant global/regional conferences.

The September 2023 SDG meeting of the UN was prepared by the G7 Summit (Hiroshima 2023). The Hiroshima G7 meeting took place in the spirit of transformation to sustainable development and in the political environment of the Ukrainian war. Accordingly, the main message of this meeting was both the support for the full sovereignty of Ukraine as a political declaration on one side, and the central concept, the framing of the strategic message on sustainable development in the Summit as an official document on the other. Thus,

5 The Bertelsmann’s Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) have focused on three main issues: sustainable policies, robust democracy and good governance (SGI Bertelsmann 2022). This approach has also indicated that the US has an especially weak performance compared to the West European countries.

the *G7 Leaders' Statement on Ukraine* was issued in Hiroshima with the strong statement that 'We are renewing our commitment to provide the financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support Ukraine requires for as long as it takes' (G7 2023a: 1). At the same time the long official Summit document, the *G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communique* (G7 2023b) has emphasised that the main task of the global strategy is to accelerate achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the sustainability requirements have been described in this document from all sides.

Amid the heightened uncertainty, but based on multilateralism, these main suggestions for the global governance have been preparations for the 2030 UN Agenda in Sustainable Development. They have been summarised in four requirements: *first*, the quality infrastructure through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII); *second*, the global health measures through pandemic prevention to achieve universal health coverage (UHC); *third*, striving for fiscal sustainability of the strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth; and *fourth*, the importance of investment in human capital to ensure a just transition in response to the structural changes such as digital and green transformations. The Communique strongly condemns the widespread use of information manipulation and media interference by Russia in order to gain support for and to obscure the facts of its war of aggression against Ukraine. Finally, it suggests building constructive and stable relations with China in order to enable sustainable economic relations and a rules-based world order of global interest, but it warns about the excesses of the dependencies in the critical supply chains, especially from China's 'credit colonialism' and 'non-market policies', which distort the global economy.

It was already evident in this global neoliberal theoretical wasteland and the sharp ideological warfare that an effort for innovative and fair multilateralism could only be fought on a global scale. So, the SDG Reports have systematised both the negative and positive spillover effects, given that the negative externalia hinder progress and preclude the democratic movements for a new knowledge-based development. Still the collapse of the OWO and the emergence of the NWO has produced a new kind of systemic uncertainty that demanded the new type of consolidation through this dynamic transformation. The NWO has entered as a security-centred world order by the new, extended and complex meaning of security in all possible fields from the military to energy security as the 'supply' of everything. As a result, weaponising and securitising have become common twins that have led to the globalisation of securitisation in this emerging rules-based world order at a much higher level than before. Pandemia as the health security issue has proved to be a classic case of securitisation by first disconnecting and later reconnecting the regional-national-local units globally. These foreign relations have changed much more quickly than the internal relationships, therefore the global issues and the accommodation to them has

come to the fore in the NWO. This transformation has been facing the current information disorder because of the weaponisation of fake news, but it has been supported by the international communication-cooperation agreements, which has facilitated the multilateral securitisation.

Overcoming the polycrisis by complexity management and multilateral securitisation

The pandemic and the Ukrainian war have shaped the new geopolitical realities with a new wide security policy agenda in all dimensions to cope with this increasing SDG system as complexity management and multilateral securitisation, because polycrisis means multiple global challenges affecting the entire world simultaneously through hyperconnectivity and desecuritisation. Polycrisis has become a widespread term in the 2020s, since it very markedly expresses the new features of the global crisis (see WEF 2023b, 2023c). *Complexity management* may have two faces, interrupting/removing the connectivity as *de-coupling* – or de-linking – and multilateral securitisation as *de-risking* – or de-weaponising. So, these two key terms for overcoming the polycrisis indicate the opposite highways of complexity management. More or less, it is clear that the latest decisions of the US tend more towards the de-coupling and the EU efforts more towards the de-risking in this terminology, and these characteristic attitudes have appeared most markedly in their relationship to China in the hegemon triangle of the US-EU-China.

Otherwise, in the NWO and the Ukrainian war, the vocabulary of hybrid warfare has been extended from the new achievements of military technical innovations to the sanction policies and many other fields of information-disinformation warfare. While in the turbo-globalisation in the OWO there was a permanent threat caused by the *negative* externalities between/among all actors and fields of the global game that led to destabilisation, in the recent transformations in the NWO the global processes have increasingly resulted in the *positive* externalities across the SDG realm through *multilateral securitisation*. While in the OWO, the hybrid war meant threatening-hurting the security of other states or exercising hegemony over them as negative externalia, in the NWO it turns to positive externalia through the newly discovered complexity management, as if creating-reinforcing radical transformations by some new means, well beyond the traditional warfare. In the last years hybrid warfare has also taken place by some ‘peaceful’ means, by ‘weaponisation’ of the economic or information sectors through sanctions as complex psychological warfare. Paradoxically, in the emerging NWO even the former negative externalities have turned into positive externalities, like the insecurity with weaponising energy supply by Russia that has provoked deeper and quicker green transformations in the EU. Actually, the new twin key terms of sustainability and security cover

this positive process of hybridisation among the different fields globally. This is a turning point from ‘boring’ to ‘daring’ as a sharp turn from the boring, status-quo oriented and routine ‘business as usual’ approaches to the brave radical transformations, for instance in the new European green energy policy.

The turning point came with the pandemic that was a drastic and unprecedented global challenge. It concerned all fields of life, by increasing the complexity of the world order and manifesting the absurdity of the running-ruining globalisation. The final push to the change of the world systems as the real turning point in the transition period was made by the Russian aggression in Ukraine that not only presented the dangers of the re-emerging Russian empire, but also discovered the vulnerability of the OWO in general, and the necessity of radical transformations. Therefore, the present transition period is much longer, sometimes even very chaotic, more controversial and conflict-driven than the former world system-changes. It covers two stages, and these stages of the transition period have a very different character in general. That is, a ‘destructive’ stage in the late 2010s was followed by a ‘constructive’ stage in the early 2020s. It has been so, especially at the level of the global powers (US, EU and China), and both in the timing and content of these stages due to the depth of the radical transformations. The complexity of the NWO emergence is high, therefore still there is a chance that it will result in a dynamic consolidation from the mid-2020s.

The future is coming much sooner than we think, since it arrives as a sudden brutal change like a typhoon. In the process of the world-systemic change, people – who already have an idea of what the future could look like – finally understand that after the polycrisis there can be no return to the old normality, while a new normality is taking shape step by step in the (world) economy and politics, and in their everyday lives. It is not by chance that the systemic change in this big turmoil is the central term nowadays in much of the world’s media, e.g. this refers to a historical turning point or ‘watershed’, or very often the original German term ‘Zeitenwende’ for the present radical change. Turning this new vision into reality, a new conceptual framework has been elaborated in social sciences and is widely discussed every day in the media reporting about both global events – e.g. in the context of the Ukrainian war – and the tensions inside the individual countries like the energy and/or food crisis. Namely, the complexity and wide ramifications of the global changes can be exemplified with the close connection between the Ukrainian war and the energy crisis in Europe, but also between this war and the food crisis in many developing countries is due to the disturbances in the supply of the Ukrainian grain.⁶

6 It is characteristic that the Fondation Robert Schuman (2022) has also referred to the *Zeitenwende*, translated it as the ‘change of era’, and investigated its German process profoundly. Its contribution to the debate on the systemic change has been summarised by Corblin (2022). There has also been vast German literature on this subject dealing both with the end of the Merkel period and the new features of the world system, see e.g. Scholz (2023).

Although it was evident that the pandemic influenced all fields of life world-wide, the recognition of the depth and complexity in the world-systemic change still remained partial in the early 2020s, restricted mostly to the instant crisis management of the pandemic. The shock of the Ukrainian war has been needed to recognise and accept the concept of global systemic change in its totality, embracing also the solution of climate crisis due to the brutal effects of energy crisis and desecuritisation. After the outbreak of the Ukrainian war the systemic change in its many varieties has become widely discussed in world politics and media, first of all in EU politics. This conceptual framework of the current global crisis, as the transition period between the two world systems has been conceived in the twin terms of preparedness and response, and conceptualised in the central term of resilience. Theoretically it has also involved the new key term of sustainable development or inclusive growth, but it has only been implemented on a large scale just under the pressure of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The 'world disorder' was an entry to the long transitory period between the world systems, and in the second, ongoing stage of the transitory period, however, there has been an emerging readiness to create synergy and resilience with the necessary political decisions for the global reconstruction. It has been testing the reform capacity for the new sustainable development of all countries, and the world order in general despite the second big 'pain'.

Thus, the necessity of the world-systemic change has become rather clear and manifest, with various terms whirling about, but pointing to the same direction: the former world order is over. This earlier world order was introduced around 1989 and it has been crumbling finally with the efforts of Russia to restore its empire, and last but not least, with the entry of China to the world-wide power game as the new global hegemon. Actually, a new multipolar world system is emerging with three global hegemonies, the US, EU and China, while Russia has dreamed about a return to the former bipolar world order, but as a result of its counterproductive aggression against Ukraine, it has ceased to even be a real global power. As for the roadmap of the NWO, the global hegemonies have three different timetables for the world systemic change. Briefly, the US realised early the decay of the world system, but moved only half-heartedly to the second, constructive stage, while due to its spectacular development China realised it belatedly, and still has a big delay in its entry to the second stage. Due to the dominance of the Economic Europe over Social Europe, the EU was awkward in its realisation of the world system's decay, but after the shock of the pandemic and Ukrainian war it has produced an eminent constructive second stage, in which the enlargement of the EU in the form of the European Political Community has also reappeared.

Therefore, it is very important to point out that behind this emerging power game between the three global hegemonies there has been a complete failure of the old-time, running globalisation. This kind of destructive globalisation

has been ruining its own preconditions following the idea of limitless growth and excessive consumption, resulting in the threat of the ecological disaster and by drastically presenting the final limits of this harmful economic growth and consumption. While the declining period of the former world system in the 2010s was producing the *divergence* among/between the main fields of development, the emerging new world system in the 2020s has made a very ambitious project to build up their *synergy* first of all between sustainable economic growth and ecological conditions. In spite of the present progressive developments, the apocalyptic vision is still with us in many ways. The ‘pains’ of globalisation have continued with the emergence of the NWO due to the Ukrainian war, therefore the collapse of the global networks, the demolition and the disintegration of global supply chains is still shocking a large part of the population world-wide.

The former conceptual framework behind this running globalisation was based on the primitivisation of world affairs by the neoliberal approach embracing only the pure economic interests, exclusively with their direct effects and totally neglecting the complex global effects of all actions and their sequences of remote ramifications. This oversimplified concept of market fundamentalism has been the deep conviction and the practical philosophy of the big multis – and even more so in a more sophisticated way of the tech-moguls – which has focused only on direct profit interests. It has neglected the effects of their economic actions on the world-wide process of running globalisation, although in fact their complex process has also produced many negative external effects, damaging the human universe. The full-blown running globalisation in the 2010s was the deepest point of the former world system and its regulated world order, and it has led to the decomposition of the world order into world disorder. The outgoing and incoming global hegemonies also contributed to this world disorder, but in very different ways. Russia with the re-awakening of its aggressive behaviour against the post-Soviet states has reached its peak in the 2020s in Putin’s ‘special action’ against Ukraine. The behaviour of Russia has been violating many legal regulations in both the OWO and the NWO that has been in fact the suicide of the age-old Russian empire, ending even Russia’s role as a world power through the new hybrid world war. So has done China in the last decade, since it has also been violating the framework of the economic world order, mostly with its ill-famed world-wide ‘business invasion’ or contract colonisation, representing a formidable economic challenge for both US and EU. Finally, the US as a declining global power produced manifestly aggressive and counterproductive global behaviour in the Trump presidency. It has only been mistakenly corrected with the slogan of the Biden presidency ‘back to leadership’, although the APSA president, John Ishiyama, has announced that political science in the US has already suggested ‘a transformative moment’ in the postpandemic world (Ishiyama, 2023: 423).

In general, the main conclusion of the experience from the ongoing world crisis is that the acknowledgement and the statement about the major contradictions of the given system is by far not enough, since the strong network of the present processes and vested interests prevents any meaningful action to overcome these contradictions by a radical systemic change. The real systemic change begins only with a deep crisis, which unleashes a painful period in all social fields that convinces the large part of a population of the unavailability of the New Great Transformation with its simple formulation 'no pain – no gain'. The lesson of the present crisis period with the pandemic and Ukrainian war is that the harmful effects of the 'disharmony' with 'pain' have to come first in order to open the way for the deep changes in the second stage, so this painful stage is necessary to reach the positive side of the new 'harmony' with 'gain'.

While the BWO split the world system into two parts – leaving the so called Third World somewhat 'in-between' – the OWO unified it under the unipolar world dominated by the US. This 'total' victory of the West and the 'free market' meant the myth of the End of History for the extreme neoliberals and launched a running or turbo-globalisation. Thus, the OWO became a very controversial era of neoliberalism, with a rapid economic development and modernisation worldwide as running globalisation on one side, and with many economic, social and political defects, negative externalities as 'ruining' globalisation worldwide on the other side. The ruining effect was mostly seen as overburdening the ecological system, but the negative effects cumulated in the dissipation of the illusion of global democratisation, again worldwide. The positive process of rapid economic development had negative effects not only in the Global South, but in the Global North as well, although in a different way. The unified economic world produced an almost untransparent global world with a complicated system of interdependencies that turned out from the other side to be dangerous dependencies in this polycrisis for all countries. Untransparent, since the complicated supply chain and multilevel effects were so complex that they could not be followed at all in all details, and the leading actors were living for most of the OWO period in an enthusiasm of 'limitless' growth. The pandemic in this respect was a turning point indeed, in the respect that it brutally discovered this jungle of hidden connections and effects, that appeared much earlier, but were not so catastrophic. The OWO in its decline turned out to be a fragmented world order that reached its peak in the transition period, which has been continued in the form of the multipolar world system where the stronger middle powers are demanding some partial, even exceptional, regulations for themselves or for their macro-region.

All in all, the OWO was an era of interdependence turning to dependence as a jungle, first it was seen from the positive, and later more and more from the negative side. It made the US 'great', but undermined it with tremendous internal tension. China was a beneficiary, also moving later towards the nega-

tive externalities of economic growth, realising the self-inflicted wounds of creating a new society within the frame of the old political system and the constraints of dependency for a modernised economic system. This leads us to the political framing of this 'revolutionary' economic development as 'building empires' in the superpowers that has to be considered as a 'longue durée' in history. Russia, including the Soviet period, has a long tradition of building empire, which returned after the chaotic period of Yeltsin. As usual, it has been based first of all on the traditional capacity of the military conquer and power, nowadays combined with hybrid warfare. The US had military domination in the leadership function in the OWO that proved to be too costly and inefficient. The process of building empire in China has been even longer and more multifaceted in its historical development, continued as the conquer of Tibet, the recapture of Hong Kong, with a brutal extension of power in some parts within China (Xinxiang province). The more sophisticated extension has been beyond China in some parts of Central Asia, the South China Sea area, reinforced by the new efforts of Xi Jinping, the 'Communist Monarch'. The postwar EU was under US protection in the BWO, and remained under the US security umbrella by NATO in the OWO. The EU as 'Economic Europe' was enjoying the *drogue* of interdependencies and realising the pain of the increasing dependencies only much later. The EU could not escape the neoliberal illusion of 'free' interdependence, and that illusion led to some kind of happy self-cheating about the miraculous 'peaceful' transformation effects through economic contacts, like FDI and intensive trade.⁷

It is clear, however, in a longer historical perspective that the ongoing radical changes by building up a new multipolar world system have also been removing the last vestiges of the BWO the developed between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian war represents this long-lasting radical change across the world systems actually, and even symbolically, by the fight against the return of the Soviet empire in the form of extending the Russian empire. But even so far the challenge of the recent NGT has been much broader and deeper than the final removal of the bipolar world, or by that of the unipolar world dominated by the US, since it has basically been a creative response to the destructive wave of the 'running globalization' in the last decades that has provoked the climate crisis threatening mankind with an apocalypse.

The main lesson from the ongoing world crisis is that the recognition of the major contradictions in the world system with radical statements about the necessary changes is by far not enough, since the strong network of the

7 The meaning of the 'empire' has also changed historically, which became evident first between the transition from the British to the American empire due to the transition from direct to more indirect rule, from the classical to the softer, neoliberal colonisation. Even more so in the case of the Chinese 'economic' empire that comes up very vividly in the NWO.

current short-term interests can prevent any meaningful action to overcome these contradictions in the global crisis. Captured by the outdated system, most global actors were very reluctant for a long time to go through the meaningful transformations and/or to comply with the rule of law in the emerging new world system. The real systemic change begins only with the recent deep crisis, which has unleashed a new painful period in all social fields. Only this pressure convinces a large part of the population of the unavailability of the New Great Transformation with its simple formulation ‘no pain – no gain’. The lesson of the present crisis period with the pandemic and the Ukrainian war is that these harmful effects of the global ‘disharmony’ with its increasing ‘pain’ have been needed to open the way for the deep changes in the second stage. Thus, the first negative, painful stage was necessary to reach the positive side of the new global ‘harmony’ with its complex, synergic ‘gain’, although the second, creative stage has also some new kinds of ‘pain’ in completing the radical transformation.

The emergence of the Tripolar World Order: De-coupling and de-risking perspectives

In the present transition period, the outlines of the multipolar world have become more and more visible, namely in the formation of the tripolar world system of the US, EU and China organised as the NWO. It seems so that – due to the Ukrainian war and Russia declining as a world power – the last vestiges of the (old) bipolar world will disappear, but the US will regain a somewhat stronger role in the NWO than in the declining OWO, as President Biden has emphasised repeatedly. Actually, the Tripolar World Order has been born, and all the three global hegemonies have their special profiles and specific contributions to the NWO. Namely the US has represented the continuity of the world systems since the Second World War, first of all as the leading military power and also as the chief actor in global institutions. China is the country of robust modernisation, turning out to be the main competitor of the West in economic globalisation by also claiming the position of leadership in the Global South. This radical change creates that particular historical situation in which China appears as a competitor for the global leading role due to its spectacular economic development in the last decades. This analysis outlines mostly the contradictory character of the American and Chinese entry into this new tripolar world in the two stages, and it concludes with the constructive changes within the EU that has raised the European Challenge for both US and China.⁸

8 On the new role of China in the world system there has been a very vast literature, see the Mercator Institute for China Studies (Merics 2020, 2022) in general. The most fashionable topic has been the claim for the new Chinese role in Doshi (2021), EIU (2022a, 2022b), EPC (2022), Feng (2020), Optenhögel (2022) and Wang (2022).

Most analysts still describe the emerging world system as a reemerging bipolar world order with the US and China as their increasing bilateral tension indicates, although the transition to a NWO has manifested that both hegemon powers have serious internal and external deficiencies or internal hurdles. While the EU has been threatened by the US 'vassalisation' (Puglerin – Shapiro 2023), at the same time, due to its creative character in creating synergy between/among all basic fields of reglobalisation, the *initiative* role of the EU in the world system's level has appeared rather clearly. The pandemic showed us that the EU is capable of adapting to the complexity of the rapid changes, and also that there could be even more innovations in the next years than in any other decade in EU history. Nevertheless, focusing on the still ongoing transition period of world systemic change in its two stages, the special character of the three hegemons appears in a manifest way that determines the structure of the NWO and its further development in the 2020s to a great extent.

The globalisation research has entered a new phase discovering the complexity of changes and the destructive character of the neoliberal globalisation, which are the focal conceptual points of this paper. The recognition of the ongoing deep change from deglobalisation to reglobalisation has been much bigger in the EU than in the US both in high politics and in the theoretical literature, and the farewell to neoliberal globalisation has been declared 'officially'. Nevertheless, the term of the new era has not been so much in the focus of public discussions in the US as in the EU or elsewhere in the world. Obviously, the US has been the classic case of neoliberalism and state capture by big business, with its self-destructive character that has been described in the political science as the crisis of US democracy and in the international relations' theory as the drastic weakening of its leading role in the world system. These two sides have been interconnected by the relative decline of the US economy, and its result is the increasing social disorder, extreme movements and deepening tensions between the two major parties – seen also by the Washington elite (The White House 2023).

This has also led to the relative decline of US democracy and the American dream that has been quasi-evident in the American political science, discussed theoretically in many papers and supported by a large amount of data from public opinion surveys (Rothstein 2022). This topic has also been at the centre of the Freedom House Reports (2022, 2023). Based on the vast US and international literature, these Reports have described the decline of US democracy as 'severe political and societal polarization' leading to 'the pernicious effects for democracy'. They have been 'reconceptualizing' the polarisation in both the global and US context and concluding that the relative decline of US democracy fits the global trend of turning from democracies to autocracies. They have also pointed out some common features between the US developments and 'the democratic erosion in Hungary and growing authoritarianism in Turkey and

Venezuela'. Thus, 'the crisis of American power' in the early 2020s was raised as an issue in 'How Europeans see Biden's America' (Leonard – Krastev 2021) and the social polarisation has been the key word in these analyses (see Levitsky – Way 2022; and Heinrich 2023).

The special US transition period with its declining global role can be best seen in its contrast with Chinese developments, since in the present stage of transition it's not Russia, but China who has become the main challenger of the US. Contrary to the US and EU developments, China was first to set a strategic alternative, but last to realise its own decay at home. Due to its controversial accommodation to the change between the world systems, China has also been captured by its own former success in neoliberal globalisation. In the late 2010s China felt that it was the winner of the OWO, but in the 2020s it has to realise more and more that it is not well prepared for the NWO. While the first stage of the transition period in the US was a negative process of decay, as the decomposition of the OWO was leading to global disorder, China saw this disorder as a *positive* process for its accelerated economic growth and widening modernisation, and a period in which China finally presented itself as a challenger of the US central position in the world system. In fact, for China the first stage was in some ways an optimistic era, beginning with the Deng Xiao-ping's invention of reform dictatorship. Again, so far, the second stage for China has been much more a *negative* – at least a very controversial – process with a deepening tension between the narrow modernisation and complex democratisation, in which all socio-political and human hurdles have increased as the main obstacles to further economic growth and modernisation.

Actually, the US and China still have a common illusion that economic growth, with any kind of modernisation, produces not only global economic and military power, but also some kind of relevant social and human progress as a large home base for global leadership. The confrontation between economic strength and overall social progress took place in the US earlier and in China much later, although none of them realised this historical trap. In China, like in the US, the turning point between the two stages appeared drastically in the early 2020s. For China, the pandemic meant the radical slowdown of economic growth as the end of the 'positive' process, although combined with, and compensated by, the growing confrontation with the US to claim the leading role in a new – seemingly bipolar – world system, which therefore has blurred the vision about the real strategic situation in China. In this respect, one can argue that China entered the second stage very belatedly, since the first stage was not 'decay' like in the US. On the contrary, it was the accelerated economic development, which made this 'decay' elsewhere a good environment for China. Arriving to the turning point, though China began to feel the economic slowdown, and new constraints and disturbances, it still elaborated a global strategy for its rapid development for the 2020s in the spirit of Xi Jinping's message from

the 2010s, claiming global leadership as the main challenger of the US. It has been formulated in the political message at the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, still not recognising the necessary social change, and in some ways moving in the opposite direction. Anyway, China was very dynamic economically in the first stage and slowed down socially in the second stage. This process can be treated as the model case of the antagonistic divide between modernisation and democratisation due to the increasing tension in the second stage, in a historical contrast with Taiwan and South Korea with their democratisation and ‘Westernization’ drive.⁹

Looking at the Chinese case, it has to be noted that the OWO period also accomplished the globalisation of the international relations’ theory moving from the narrow US focus to a wider view of the globalisation process. This paradigmatic change was particularly important for the understanding of this global process with the increasing Chinese role. The globalised research paradigm went parallel in the 2010s with the explosion of China research, since China was concerned with all aspects of the globalisation in a more complex world system. So the exclusivity of the research on China by the special group of sinologists ended. China was extremely active in the declining OWO period, since the complexity and disturbances of the global disorder offered an open space for the violations of the declining world order almost in all respects. Therefore, China research has become everybody’s concern in political and social sciences, and beyond, and so the new controversial process has been followed by many foreign policy analysts and political science experts in the 2020s. This research has been focusing on the turning point between the first and second stages, and first of all on the internal accommodation of China to the NWO, although its strategic alternative of global leadership was only formulated in vague terms in the 2010s, but coming to the fore in the 2020s. Thus, the enigma that China is an absolutely special case just for professional sinologists disappeared when it became the challenger of the US in the OWO, and its political system was discussed in the conceptual frame of the new autocracies. This new approach began with the reform dictatorship of Deng Xiao-ping and has reached full world attention with the emergence of the dynamic autocratic system of Xi Jinping (see Pei 2021).¹⁰

China’s claim for superpower status has been the official line since 2012, and it was the main message in the inaugural speech of Xi Jinping at the 20th

9 The interesting question is why Taiwan and South Korea have been moving from the successful modernisation to some kind of democratisation, and why not China. It is particularly important to emphasise here that democratisation means an internal complex political and educational mobilisation of the entire society.

10 The new role of China in world politics after the Russian aggression was in the forefront of the world media right after the outbreak of the war. The claim for the global role of China in the world system has been declared by Xi Jinping, re-elected as the leader at the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on 16 October 2022.

party congress. In the global arena China has presented this challenge against the OWO on behalf of the Global South against the Global North, at the highest level of 'geopolitics' with its claim for future global leadership. At the same time, China has been busy building macro-regional organisations as well in its own neighbourhood. Both directions have produced their own controversies and tensions that can be briefly summarised in such a way that China has actually played its pushing role beyond the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) level, and has reached the global, US-China confrontation level, although it has intensified efforts to also organise its leadership on its own specific wider macro-region.

Obviously, these parallel global and macro-regional efforts have supported each other on one side, but have weakened on the other, since the Chinese claim for macro-regional leadership has mobilised India and Japan to turn against this Chinese effort. China wanted to connect these two ways for the global role by the New Silk Road project (Belt and Road Initiative 2013) given that its global effort for leadership was based on the tremendous economic growth that made China into the second biggest economic power and which was combined with connectivity. On the other side it claims leadership in the macro-region around the South Chinese Sea – including the sea cable network debate with the US and the regional powers – by extending it to Central Asia. However, these trends have been disturbed in the second stage by the slowdown of economic development produced by the internal contradictions of the Chinese developments and by the external resistance of India and Japan.

Detecting the new Chinese crisis, it is necessary to discover its internal political and social dimensions behind the changing economic scenery. At first look, many deep contradictions have emerged with their overconcentrated public management, backsliding in public policy chiefly in the Zero Covid Campaign, and also some former actions leading to the lowering of the birth rate. Crises in the building industry and real estate connect and aggravate economic and political problems, along with both high corruption cases within the political elite and giant enterprises of tech-moguls, which raises the open question of how to control them. This is the basic dilemma nowadays for the 'Communist Monarch' as it is often mentioned in the world media. All contradictions have been cumulated in the social area of the emerging middleclass, since China has developed a global managerial class, but Chinese society does not tolerate full-blown high social polarisation and the ensuing tension with its global way of life and new patterns of this globalised strata, termed 'the Second China' (see China Power 2022; Guan 2022; Guo – Lei – Jincai – Shum 2021).

It is very difficult to qualify the political system in China, but nowadays it is not as specific and unique a case as it was decades ago. It is an interesting topic in international political science with its intensifying research on autocratic political systems. The OWO produced a challenge for democratisation that

meant a rupture with the old exclusive divide between the democracies and 'traditional' political systems, and gave a push to the research on the different kinds of the new democracies, emerging from the crisis of global democratisation and becoming the new autocracies. While it can be argued that in the US the 'economy' has captured the 'politics', or big business has captured the state, certainly in China, in an opposite way, the politics captured the economy by a developmental dictatorship. It has created a very shaky balance on the top with the obvious stronger power of the party elite with the tough social crisis management in the Xi regime. In China there has been a renewed high drive for 'party-state capitalism' combined with the age-old slogans of the Chinese Communist Party.

Altogether, the main divide in the present transatlantic relationship between the US and the EU has been how to deal with China. The latest US national security document contains resistance to China's claim for the rank of superpower, which is actually a refusal of the new bipolar world order. Unlike with Russia, this containment does not focus on military security regulations or on nuclear weapons, but on economic competition and on trade contacts, or even more so on technical containment (e.g. the production of chips) as it has been officially explained after the experiences of the Biden presidency (The White House 2023). At the same time, it has been more and more a multifaceted conflict in the polycrisis, since there are some common big multinationals between the US and China – sometimes even embracing other countries like Israel or the Netherlands – which resist to the cooling of production and trade contacts, or to stopping technology transfers. Unlike the US, the European strategy towards China has been more open and resilient as has been formulated by Ursula von der Leyen in her special message: 'it is vitally important that we ensure diplomatic stability and open communication with China. I believe that it is neither viable – nor in Europe's interests – to decouple from China. Our relations are not black or white – and our response cannot be either. This is why we need to focus on de-risk – not de-couple' (EC 2023a: 3). It seems that there was a shaky compromise between the EU and the US at the G7 Hiroshima Summit in this respect, but since then this transatlantic divide has come up new and again, obviously connected with the US claim of 'back to leadership' and with increased European openness to global transformations and higher competitiveness in the global trade.¹¹

This US-China divide, however, will be influenced to a great extent by further Chinese internal development. China is not only involved in the global economic

11 On 29 September 2021 the EU and US organised the Trade and Technology Council and issued the Inaugural Joint Statement (EC 2021) for the coordination of their global activities that has still provided a solid framework to their relationships with China. The EU has organised a project – EU & China Think-Tank Exchanges – for regulated Chinese contacts, and Germany and France have especially and strongly supported this cooperation (Carlo 2023; Chen and Qi 2023; German Government 2023).

and innovation competition, but it also has to face the global disturbances or transnational threats like global climate crisis and disruptions in the global supply chains on one side, and the increasing tension in its managerial middle class accompanied with the deepening population crisis on the other. Not surprisingly, in this post-truth world all terms and theories from the OWO have been questioned, and nowadays there is a complete cacophony in the ensuing disinformation war (see e.g. Oliveira 2022; Sawyer 2021). In such a spirit, the US, China and the EU have divergent concepts about democracy and sovereignty, since China claims to be a democracy and has elaborated its own concept of sovereignty as well.

Conclusion: The global and social citizenship as the European Challenge

This paper has tried to make a contribution to the new conceptual framework of the New Great Transformation in three main directions. First, the systemic change from the OWO to the NWO has moved through a long transition process in two very different stages of decay/decline and construction/innovation. Second, the hybridisation – or interpenetration – of several social fields, from the recent hybrid war to all kinds of security, has been the megatrend in the global system at all levels, in its hard and soft versions. Thus, there has also been a rise of two kinds of global hegemony, macro-regions, middle powers and nation-states with their special hybrid profiles. Third, the new transformations will lead to the consolidation of the NWO in the second half of the 2020s under the pressure of the European Challenge. It will be a new construct with the dynamic consolidation in the incoming new world system based on the global and social citizenship. The EU has prepared three – social, green and geopolitical – transformations to the NWO to overcome the triple crisis and to create a dynamic sustainability.

First, the transitions between the world systems in the last two cases were much shorter and less complicated, since the Bipolar World Order (BWO) of the US and Soviet Union was quickly constituted by the winners right after the Second World War. The same goes for the unipolar world system after the collapse of the Soviet Union with the OWO, since the US-dominated neoliberal world system was also created rather rapidly. The contrast with the recent ongoing transition in this respect is big, because it began already step by step in the OWO and it takes a relatively long time even in the emerging NWO because of the radical, complicated transformations in the management of polycrisis. Within the OWO there were already some important changes in the running neoliberal globalisation with the entry of the new global players, but above all with China. Although it produced a very complex system of world economy and global governance, it was overburdened with the rightful claim of all megaregions for the

institutional participation in the management of the rules-based world order, but without a real systemic breakthrough that has only just arrived in the 2020s.

The disastrous effects of the neoliberal approach on the human universe due to the running/ruining of globalisation caused a rather long stage of decay, therefore mankind lived in an ‘age of pessimism’ in the first transitory period. Nowadays, the emergence of the NWO suggests entry to the ‘Age of Optimism’, given the new perspectives of complexity management and multilateral securitisation in the polycrisis. The outlines of the new system can already be seen in this second stage of the transition, in which the competition among the global powers will lead step by step to the regulated connectivity with an increasing synergy. Thus, as the UN’s efforts for an ‘SDG world’ indicate, the reglobalisation has been conceived and planned with this synergy among many social fields. It has also been supported by the new megatrend of regionalisation/localisation, on those levels where the economic and social activities have been optimal (Angelis et al. 2022; Blockmans 2022; and UN 2023a, 2023b).

Second, this new SDG-based human universe ‘beyond the GDP’ as the new world of knowledge-based society shows a clear division between the stronger and weaker versions both horizontally and vertically in the NWO. The contrast is clear also at the highest level between the global hegemony, with the US and China on one side and the EU on the other. All in all, both the US and China are lagging behind the EU according to the complex SDG data in regular UN reports, which indicates that they are leading powers only in the traditional dimensions such as GDP and military power, but they are relatively weak in the new dimensions of complexity management and multilateral securitisation in the SDG terms, which are decisive in the long run, while the EU is strong and pioneering in these fields (EC 2023b). The same division applies vertically at all levels from the middle-powers and macro-regions to local organisations. The emergence of the NWO has also changed the entire geopolitical landscape. The new multipolar structure appears not only at the level of the three global hegemony, but also at the multiactor level in many other macroregional organisations.¹²

As a result, the institutional architecture for global governance is in a deep transformation, since all three global powers as well as the macroregional actors have been visualising a new type of globalisation, and building up a NWO both at the global and macroregional levels. Due to the wake-up call of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, the increasing synergy may already be noticed between the EU and US, often called the transatlantic moment. In general, the

¹² The UN Sustainable Development Reports cover all countries and their progressive or regressive tendencies have been described. In the latest Report (UN 2023a) on the 193 UN member states, 20 EU countries are among the first 25. The best non-EU country is Japan (21st). The US is only 39th and China is 63rd (UN 2023b). For more on the ‘beyond the GDP’ issue, see especially the World Happiness Report (2022). The ‘Think Global – Act European’ programme from the 2010s has recently been renewed in the EU, and a new institutional cycle will start in this spirit after the EP elections in 2024.

‘New West’ – also embracing Canada, Australia and in some ways Japan – is nowadays more united. It has been focusing on the reregulation of the world order in its multipolar-multiactor structure by offering some kind of New Deal for the Global South as well.

Accordingly, the main issue is that both the Global North and Global South have lost their former meanings – overburdened with former ‘East’ and ‘West’ – at the level of the countries and their populations. Even China has tried to build up a structural in-between position. On one side it makes efforts to unite the non-Western world politically with its Shanghai Cooperation Organization group, and on the another it strives to intensify its presence within the West for the success of its own complex economic modernisation. Also, an increasing number of the ‘Southern’ countries’ populations already belong to the Global North in many ways in their social position and with their dual identity. It would be misleading to consider them as compradors, since in many cases they represent the ‘the freedom fighters’ against the traditional ‘West’ by claiming some kind of ‘Western’ status for themselves. Obviously, in this period of the new ‘hybrid world war’ in Ukraine the UN is losing ground in crisis management on one side, since its basic structure and procedures still reflect the post-Second World War situation, but on the other side a new kind of cooperation has been negotiated in the UN between the emerging Global North and Global South. Accordingly, the special global organisations like the WHO and WTO have undergone a deep transformation for the support of the new Global South weakened by the polycrisis, although they still need much more creative innovation.¹³

The shocking effect of the Ukrainian war has been needed to overcome the triple global crisis, but of course the theoretical revolution as the change of paradigms has also been needed in order to elaborate the new strategic design. The explanation of the modernisation-democratisation conflict indicates that the former conceptual framework behind this running/ruining globalisation was based on the primitivisation/privatisation of the world affairs by the neoliberal approach reduced to the concept of home oeconomicus. This modernisation-centric view embraced only the economic or business interests, exclusively with their direct cost effects, and totally neglected the complex global effects of all actions as the externalia with the series of their remote ramifications. This oversimplified concept has been the deep conviction and practical philosophy of the big multis – and even more so in a more sophisticated way of the tech-moguls – which has followed only direct profit interests. It has neglected the ruining effects of the running globalisation on the world-wide process, although this complex process has produced many negative external effects damaging the entire human universe.

13 The latest developments have also been suggested by the EU, also in its relationships with wider Europe (EC 2023b).

Third, accordingly, this dynamic consolidation of the NWO proceeds at the global, regional and country levels with its innovative and retrograde versions. It appears first of all in the tendency of the combined reglobalisation and (macro) regionalisation, or 'localization', as a megatrend at these levels. Above all, in the new rules-based world order many macro-regional associations are gaining ground due to this tendency of global regionalisation with special geopolitical profiles. Thanks to the ongoing painful transformations at all levels, this emerging world system has been oriented towards the synergy that has also presupposed a claim for the common global and social citizenship, as the world-wide pandemic crisis management has shown. The basic problems of mankind, especially in the climate crisis, can only be solved through the synergy based on the twin terms of solidarity and sovereignty, cooperation and competition, globalisation cum regionalisation, as creating convergence with the mutual support of all actors concerned in all basic matters. They have been negotiated and decided by the global institutions in the first half of 2020s, and after the transitory period the new perspectives and new strategies will be consolidated in the second half of the 2020s.¹⁴

The regional/national/local versions of the NWO have appeared parallel with the global transformations as the result of ending the unlimited turbo-globalisation that overloaded the ecological system. The NWO has to counter also the widening tendency of autocratisation with many varieties of hybrid regimes between autocracy and democracy. Furthermore, the internal/national side of the pandemic crisis management has also proven that some kind of the new emerging global and extended social citizenship is needed everywhere with its complex connections in its national varieties, since in this recent reglobalised world in fact all countries are neighbours. The global and social citizenship is not wishful thinking or an ideological miracle, but an everyday process. The *global citizenship* is a tough reality in the polycrisis, since all countries and their citizens are vulnerable, and the only open question is how to manage it. As far as the extended *social citizenship* is concerned, it has to be widened just for the protection against the social and economic tsunamis of the polycrisis, since these typhoons of the sudden global changes has turned from 'rarity' to 'regularity'. But it has to be approached even more from the side of the new economy and knowledge-based society, in which the healthcare system is a part of the new production system and cannot be reduced to the illness and the problems of ageing, but has to be extended to support the activity of an entire lifetime. Therefore, the new perspective described in this paper is the wide process of the complex global-social citizenship with global 'insurance' based on human investment as the rising EU model suggests. The 'knowledge factories' as the big

14 Vít Hloušek (2023) has recently given a wide overview of the polycrisis management in the EU, seen from the side of the East-Central European development, considering this region as a 'good lab' for crisis management.

policy institutes in the EU – like EPC and CEPS – have been engaged in strategic research on the transformations in the NWO by focusing on the global and social citizenship in their close and intricate combinations that offers a large variety of global, regional and local solutions of the polycrisis. Both the universal health coverage and the investment in human capital figure high among the sustainability requirements as social sustainable transition and strategic autonomy in the EU (see recently ETUI 2023 and Social Europe Publishing 2023).

Altogether, this paper has tried to show that the EU has played an initiative and constructive role in the transformation of the world system and the European Challenge has appeared in the elaboration of the sustainable development and multilevel global governance. On that base, the European Challenge has also been formulated markedly in its new geopolitical role, balancing the US as transatlantic cooperation and securing the interdependent relationships with China. Finally, the most radical change has taken place inside the EU towards federalisation, including the new efforts for the organisation of the European Political Community in its neighbourhood. All these processes are still in their innovative stage with many hurdles and contradictions, but with a good perspective of their consolidation in the NWO framework in the second half of the 2020s.

References

- De Angelis, F. – Mollet, F. – Rayner, L. (2022): Rethinking EU economic governance: The foundation for an inclusive, green and digital transition, *EPC*: available at https://epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/EU_economic_governance.pdf
- Ágh, A. (2019): *Declining Democracy in East-Central Europe: The Divide in the EU and Emerging Hard Populism*, Edward Elgar: Cheltenham UK and Northampton, MA, USA, p. 308
- Ágh, A. (2021): *Awaking Europe in the Triple Global Crisis: The Birth Pangs of the Emerging Europe*, Edward Elgar: Cheltenham UK and Northampton, MA, USA, p. 231
- Ágh, A. (2022a): The Orbán regime as ‘the perfect autocracy’: The emergence of the ‘zombie democracy’ in Hungary, *Politics in Central Europe* 18(1): 1–15.
- Ágh, A. (2022b): The third wave of autocratization in East-Central Europe, *Journal of Comparative Politics* 13(2): 72–87.
- Blockmans, S., ed. (2022): *A transformational moment? The EU’s response to Russia’s war in Ukraine*, CEPS: available at file:///D:/Downloads/A-transformational-moment_The-EUs-response-to-Russias-war-in-Ukraine.pdf
- Bott, U. (2023): A New “Washington Consensus”: A Holy Grail? *Globalist*: available at <https://www.theglobalist.com/a-new-washington-consensus-a-holy-grail/> (17 May, 2023).
- Carlo, I. (2023): EU–China relations at a crossroads, Vol. II: Decoding complexity, mitigating risk, *EPC*: available at <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/EUChina-relations-at-a-crossroads-Vol-II-Decoding-complexity-mitigating-risk> (31 July, 2023).

- CEPS (2022): Intereconomics Annual Conference: De-Globalization – A New World Order? available at https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-events/de-globalisation-a-new-world-order/?mc_cid=6437565ce5&mc_eid=ba1d4fbb60 (8 November, 2022)
- Chen Qingqing – Qi Xijia (2023): France opposes ‘decoupling’ after economic talks with China, *Global Times*: available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1295337.shtml> (30 July, 2023)
- China Power (2022): How well-off is China’s middle class? available at <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-middle-class/>
- Corblin, A. (2022): A change of era (Zeitenwende) in Germany and its implication for European integration, *European issues n°641*: available at <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-641-en.pdf>
- Cornwall Summit Documents (2021): G7 Carbis Bay Health Declaration: available at <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2021cornwall/index.html> (13 June, 2021)
- Doshi, R. (2021): *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Oxford University Press: available at <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-long-game-chinas-grand-strategy-to-displace-american-order/>
- European Commission (2021): EU-US Trade and Technology Council Inaugural Joint Statement, 29. 09. 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_4951
- European Commission (2023a): Speech by President von der Leyen on EU-China relations to the Mercator Institute for China Studies and the European Policy Centre: available at file:///D:/Downloads/Speech_by_President_von_der_Leyen_on_EU-China_relations_to_the_Mercator_Institute_for_China_Studies_and_the_European_Policy_Centre.pdf
- European Commission (2023b): Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring Report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context: available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-flagship-publications/w023/ks-04-23-184>
- Economist Intelligence Unit (2022a): *Democracy Index 2021: The China challenge*: available at https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/?utm_source=economist&utm_medium=daily_chart&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2021
- Economist Intelligence Unit (2022b): Global economic implications of the Russia-Ukraine war: available at https://www.eiu.com/n/global-economic-implications-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/?utm_source=mkt-content&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EIUViewpoint-ukraine-war&utm_term=read-the-
- EPC Commentary (2022): The war in Ukraine: China walking amid the shrapnel by Ricardo Borges de Castro, *EPC*: available at <https://epc.eu/en/Publications/The-war-in-Ukraine-China-walking-amid-the-shrapnel~466d4c>
- Piasna, A. – Theodoropoulou S. – Countouris N., eds (2023): *Democracy with foresight. the key to a socially sustainable transition in Europe (and beyond)*, ETUI: available at <https://www.etui.org/publications/benchmarking-working-europe-2023>
- Feng, Y. (2020): *China and Multilateralism: From Estrangement to Competition*, Routledge.
- Fondation Robert Schuman (2020): A change of era (Zeitenwende) in Germany and its implication for European integration, Issue 993.

- Freedom House (2022): Freedom in the World: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule: available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf
- Freedom House (2023): Nations in Transit 2023: War Deepens a Regional Divide: available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/NIT_2023_Digital.pdf
- German Government (2023): Strategy on China: available at <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2608580/49d50fecc479304c3da2e2079c55e106/china-strategie-en-data.pdf> (12 July, 2023)
- Goldstrom, S. (2022): Transformation and “the more things change”: A conversation with Seth Goldstrom, *McKinsey & Company*: available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/transformation/our-insights/transformation-and-the-more-things-change-a-conversation-with-seth-goldstrom#0> (27 May, 2022).
- Gomez-Echeverri, L. (2018): Climate and development: enhancing impact through stronger linkages in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals Royal Society 376 (2119): 1–18: available at <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rsta.2016.0444>
- Guan, Y. (2022): Ethnic diversity and social welfare provision in non-democracies: Evidence from China, *International Political Science Review* 43 (1): 85–102
- Guo Jiannan – Lei Zhang – Jincui He (2022): China’s new road to prosperity? *IPS*: available at https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/economy-and-ecology/chinas-new-road-to-prosperity-5643/?utm_source=Social&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_campaign=chinas-new-road-to-prosperity&utm_id=Newsletter
- G7 (2023a): G7 Statement on Ukraine: available at https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/230519-01_g7_en.pdf
- G7 (2023b) Hiroshima Leaders Communique: available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/64497/g7-2023-hiroshima-leaders-communiqu%C3%A9.pdf>
- Heinrich, M. (2023): The U.S. Faces Its Greatest Peril Since the Civil War, *Globalist*: available at <https://www.theglobalist.com/the-u-s-faces-its-greatest-peril-since-the-civil-war/>
- Helliwell, J. F. – Layard, R. – Sachs, J. D. – De Neve, J. – Akin, L. B. – Wang, S. (2022): World Happiness Report, available at <https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/WHR+22.pdf>
- Hloušek, V. (2023): Linking European Integration with Illiberalism: ‘Laboratory’ of Central-Eastern Europe, *Politics in Central Europe* 19 (2): 217–234.
- Ishiyama, J. (2023): Whiter Political Science in a Post-Pandemic World? APSA Presidential Address, *APSA* 21 (2).
- Leonard, M. – Krastev, I. (2021): The crisis of American power: How Europeans see Biden’s America, *European Council on Foreign Relations*: available at <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/>
- Levitsky, S. – Way, L. (2022): America’s Coming Age of Instability: Why Constitutional Crises and Political Violence Could Soon Be the Norm, *Foreign Affairs*: available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-01-20/americas-coming-age-instability>

- Mercator Institute for China Studies (2022a): Key takeaways from the Xi's report to the party congress: available at <https://merics.org/en/merics-briefs/key-takeaways-xis-report-party-congress>, <https://merics.org/en/2024-national-congress-ccp>
- Oliveira, F. (2022): Democracy in the prison of political science, *International Political Science Review* 43 (5): 648–661.
- Optenhögel, U. (2022): Unequal best friends – China, Russia, and the war over Ukraine, *FEPS*: available at <https://progressivepost.eu/unequal-best-friends-china-russia-and-the-war-over-ukraine/>
- Pei, Minxin (2021): China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow, *Journal of Democracy* 32 (2): 5–21: available at <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/china-totalitarianisms-long-shadow/#f4>
- Puglerin, J. – Shapiro, J. (2023): The art of vassalisation: How Russia's war on Ukraine has transformed transatlantic relations, *ECFR*: available at <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-art-of-vassalisation-how-russias-war-on-ukraine-has-transformed-transatlantic-relations/>
- Rothstein, B. (2022): Europe and the future of US democracy, *Social Europe*: available at <https://socialeurope.eu/europe-and-the-future-of-us-democracy>
- Sawyer, M. (2021): Beyond social democracy and neo-liberalism: towards a social economy, *PSL Quarterly Review* 74 (299): 287–306: available at https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa04/psl_quarterly_review/article/view/17672/16774
- Scholz, O. (2023): The Global Zeitenwende, *Foreign Affairs*: available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war>
- SGI Bertelsmann (2022): Mission Statement: available at https://www.sgi-network.org/2022/Mission_Statement
- Social Europe Publishing (2023): Social Europe – Strategic Autonomy: available at <https://www.socialeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Beyond-the-cost-of-living-crisis-addressing-Europes-lack-of-strategic-autonomy-Print.pdf>
- Shum, D. (2021): *Red Roulette – an Insider's Story of Wealth, Power, Corruption, and Vengeance in Today's China*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- The White House (2023): Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution: available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/04/27/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-renewing-american-economic-leadership-at-the-brookings-institution/>
- UN (2023a): Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDG): available at <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdg/gsdg2023>
- UN (2023b): Sustainable Development Report 2023, Rankings: available at <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings>
- Wang, H. (2022): China's foreign policy is misunderstood, *IPS*: available at https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/chinas-foreign-policy-is-misunderstood-5846/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=chinas-foreign-policy-is-misunderstood

- World Economic Forum (2023a): The Global Risks Report 2023: available at https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf
- World Economic Forum (2023b): We're on the brink of a 'polycrisis' – how worried should we be? available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/polycrisis-global-risks-report-cost-of-living/>
- World Economic Forum (2023c): This is why "polycrisis" is an useful way of looking at the world right now: available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/polycrisis-adam-tooze-historian-explains/>
- Zenglein, M. (2020): Mapping and recalibrating Europe's economic interdependence with China, *Mercator Institute for China Studies*: available at <https://merics.org/en/report/mapping-and-recalibrating-europes-economic-interdependence-china>

Attila Ágh is a Professor Emeritus in the Political Science Department at the Budapest Corvinus University. He was the founder and the former Head of Department of Political Science at this University, the Director of the Research Centre "Together for Europe" and also the President of the Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA). He was a visiting professor at many universities from Aarhus to Vienna, and also from New Delhi to Los Angeles. His major research interest is comparative politics with special regard to the EU developments, focusing the Europeanization and Democratization in the New Member States. He has published more than twenty books and dozens of papers in the international journals. Email: attila.agh@chello.hu.