

NOVEMBER 22-24, 2013

IF DEMOCRACIES WON'T, ALTERNATIVE WILL: REVIVING GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

— Ivan Krastev

Some three decades ago the former American Vice President Dan Quayle famously observed: “The future will be better tomorrow”. He was wrong. The future was better yesterday, at least in the West. Today, the majority of Americans perceive themselves as losers out of globalization.

And, polls show, 60 percent of the citizens of the European Union tend to believe that their children will have a life that is worse than their own. Managing uncertainty has turned out to be more difficult than containing the Soviet Union.

Without an enormous paradigm shift in our collective thinking, the idea that democracies will take on more global responsibility any time soon is a non-starter. That said, non-democracies are no better prepared to fill that void on the global playing field. Mistrust in governments and the political and business elites is the new normal. Governments, both democratic and non-democratic, find it almost impossible to govern.

They find it increasingly difficult to tax the rich, to capture terrorists and to integrate immigrants. Nobody can afford international interventionist adventure beyond their immediate home region.

The sources of instability are different and country-specific depending on the nature of the regimes, but what is common is that instability within the states and not the rivalry between them defines global politics.

In his book *The Globalization Paradox*, Harvard economist Dani Rodrik argues that there are three options in managing the tensions between democracy, sovereignty and the global market.

One can restrict democracy in order to gain competitiveness in international markets. One can limit

globalization in the hope of building democratic legitimacy at home. Or, governments can globalize democracy at the cost of national sovereignty.

The non-option is hyper-globalization, democracy, and self-determination, all at once. Yet this is exactly what most of the governments would like to have. They want people to have the right to vote, but they are not prepared to allow them to choose the “wrong policies.”

They want to be able to reduce labor costs and to ignore social protests, but they are extremely wary of being authoritarian. They favor free trade and interdependence, but they want to have the final say in deciding on the rules and laws of the national markets. So, instead of choosing among sovereign democracy, globalized democracy, or globalization-friendly authoritarianism, political elites try to redefine democracy and sovereignty in order to make the impossible possible – to reconcile the irreconcilable.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, states struggle to manage the backlash against globalization, not globalization itself. It is not small countries but Great Powers who dream of independence today.

Americans trust in God, Constitution and...shale gas to make them independent. In the case of China, the government struggles to turn domestic consumption into the primary engine of economic growth with the hope that China can better protect herself from the troubles beyond her border.

In the case of Russia, the effort to control the negative effects of interdependency took the form of what commentators called “nationalization of the elites.” Moscow wants to sell its natural resources

to the world (this is Putin's only chance to stay in power) but the Kremlin does its best to eliminate any external influence on its politics.

And in the case of the EU, the push for further integration is justified much more as a way to control globalization than as a way to promote it.

So, the rise of the political attractiveness of regionalism cannot come as a surprise. Great Powers have lost hope in any functioning global governance and bet on consolidating their own trade and political blocs. If, some years ago, regionalization was a strategy for building a more global world, now it is perceived as an alternative to it. The rise of regionalism is another part of the new normal.

It is evident in Russia where building the Eurasian Union is becoming the center-piece of the Kremlin's foreign policy. It is evident in the West where a priority is the establishment of a free trade agreement between the US and the EU and the perspective of Trans-Pacific partnership for Asia.

And it can be detected in China's policies in Asia and Africa. The world has gone regional and the global norms and standards have lost their appeal. So, who will be the winners and who will be the losers in the new game? Will the new passion for independence pay back?

Energy independent America will be less exposed to the shocks of the Middle East but she will most likely lose much of her influence in the region. Russia can succeed bringing home the money and the children of the offshore elite, but will it make it more relevant in international politics? And when China succeeds in making domestic consumption the engine of her economic growth will she be better able to shape the world? The mystery of power in the interdependent world is that the sources of your vulnerability are also the sources of your influence.

So, be prepared for the prospect that the future will not be better tomorrow. If yesterday nation states mobilized internal resources in order to achieve global influence, today they try to mobilize global resources in order to secure social and political stability at home.

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