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HARBINGERS OF THE CIVILIZATION OF RATIONAL ABUNDANCE

ABSTRACT

Ecological barriers to economic growth and the Third Great Depression are usually only seen as a threat. I argue that they can and should be treated as an opportunity to overcome the model of civilization of wastefulness and military expansionism, by creating and implementing a higher stage of progress: a civilization of rational sufficiency. Premises of such progress are now visible – not only in the virtual ideas and projects, but in the real innovations. Such progress requires changes not only in economics but also in political relations – democracy understood not only as the right to co-decision, but also as a duty of responsibility for social and ecological consequences of economic and political decisions.

Keywords: Third Great Depression, premises of progress, civilization, rational sufficiency

CRISIS – THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SAVING THE DEMOCRATIC FREE-MARKET CIVILIZATION

ECOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO economic growth and the Third Great Depression are usually perceived as a threat. However, they may also be viewed as a perfect opportunity for abandoning the crisis-prone model of the civilization of prodigality and military expansionism by creating and implementing the higher level of progress: the civilization of rational abundance. Such approach is becoming increasingly popular – it is reflected not only in virtual ideas and projects, but also in real life.

This new thinking involves abandoning the predominant ideas of the past, such as moralizing and threatening with negative effects of ecological barriers and economic crisis. It makes us appreciate new ways of fighting the crisis, which are more likely not only to save global civilization, but also to create its more effective model through a “leap in the future.”

RETROSPECTIVE SELF-CRITICISM

Prof. Andrzej Małkiewicz has recently noted [in: *Kryzys. Polityczne, ekologiczne i ekonomiczne uwarunkowania*, 2010: 54] that I was one of the few people who predicted the present economic depression. I wrote about it in my article “Zwiastuny II wielkiej depresji i III wojny światowej?,” published in a low-circulation periodical *Kontrpropozycje*, no. 1(2)/2002. High-circulation magazines obviously showed no interest in my forecast. My pessimism contrasted with the atmosphere of “honeymoon years,” as Poland was going through the transformation from socialist “poverty” into capitalist “abundance” and Polish people pinned a lot of hopes on European integration. It is quite understandable that pessimistic voices were unwelcome. I would be happy myself if my predictions would have proved wrong.

The contemporary threats to the global civilization are well known: the ecological conflict, which has been increasing for decades, and the Third Great Depression in the area of economy, which began at the end of 2007. After three years, it has become evident that this is not a cyclical recession – a *bear market* which clears the market of superfluous elements and turns into a subsequent *bull market* – but a deep and long-lasting depression. The Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman maintains this is the third great depression in the history of the world: “It will probably be more similar to the Long Depression of the 19th century (also known as the Panic of 1873) than to the Great Depression of the 20th century, which was a lot more dramatic. Its costs – for the world’s economy, especially for millions of people at risk of unemployment – will unquestionably be high.” (“The Third Depression,” *The New York Times*, June 27, 2010). Many experts believe that the crisis will last for at least seven more years (Robert J. Shiller, “Seven More Years of Hard Times?,” Project Syndicate 2010). Hence, the forecast expressed in the article reminded by prof. Małkiewicz turned out to be true in this respect.

I do admit that I was only half right – my prediction concerning the outbreak of the Third World War proved to be wrong. At the time I wrote my article, another military conflict seemed quite probable. After all, both previous Great Depressions

ended with wars. The aim of those wars was not only to “extinguish” social conflicts (by imparting the character of international conflicts to them), but also to fuel economy. The prerequisite for the cycle of capital reproduction is the sales and consumption, which restore demand – military demand is more easily restorable and grows faster as it is usually destroyed completely.

Wars ruined the countries they had swept through – but not all nations were affected. Those societies that stayed far from battlefields – benefited from them. In the first half of the 20th century, Europe – and Poland in particular – experienced disastrous effects of two world wars. The United States, however, doubled its economic potential after each of those wars had ended. It was due to the fact that armed conflicts did not directly affect the American territory – this superpower neighbours on weaker countries in the north and south, and is protected by the Atlantic Ocean in the east and the Pacific in the west. Thanks to the wars the USA waged overseas from the end of the 19th century, it gained supply that stimulated its economy. Thus, it is often defined as a “warfare/welfare state” (see: Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America*, 2009). No wonder that America has initiated so many wars – such as in Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan – as they helped to reproduce demand for weapons and made it possible to test them in training grounds abroad. The American economy still significantly relies on armament: the USA is the largest arms exporter in the world.

When I predicted another Great Depression ten years ago, I believed that the world’s superpowers wanted to evoke another global conflict as it would boost their economies due to increased military demand. It would have been quite easy to find a pretext - the need for fighting real threats such as on-going local conflicts (e.g. the Palestinian-Israeli one) or dens of fanatical terrorists in different countries or regions, as well as some invented dangers, like the motives behind the attack on Hussein’s regime in Iraq...

THERE WILL PROBABLY BE NO THIRD WORLD WAR

Today I must admit my forecast concerning the possibility of the Third World War was wrong. The reason is not the fact that war, which allows making money on military demand, is something “dirty” and “immoral.” It has never been an obstacle for those who made fortunes on armed conflicts.

There are three aspects that undermine my prediction.

Firstly, the causes and the nature of Depression have completely changed.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was the crisis of overproduction – the increasing excess capacity not matched by purchasing power of the most developed countries. The crisis was brought under control and the economy was fuelled thanks to increased demand – both the consumer demand, stimulated through the programmes of the “affluent state” and the “abundant society,” and the military demand, boosted by the Second World War, arms race with the Soviet Union and local conflicts.

The contemporary Great Depression has been caused by the crisis of overconsumption. Its main reason was the ecological crisis – the loss caused by the international race which consists in transforming nature into goods (the actual nature of the economic growth as measured by the global GDP of countries). In order to fight the crisis it is necessary to reduce rather than increase production which destroys our planet and depletes its resources. Thus, neither the global military conflict nor the dissemination of the “abundant society” can serve as a remedy (My precise explanation of the differences between Depressions can be found in the entry published in Google’s encyclopaedia – www.kryzysnadkonsumpcji2007-20?? – a knol unit by Mariusz Gulczyński).

Secondly, great, global scale wars break out when they are needed by a few economic and political superpowers, which want to use them to reinforce their international status and to distract attention from their domestic problems (Konopnicka summed up this approach saying that “it is the kings who are the bravest warriors, but it is the peasants who usually die.” Today, the global military conflict would have to turn into a nuclear war, which would threaten not only ordinary people, but also those in power (it is clearly shown in the movie about the leaders’ motivation during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962).

Thirdly, and most importantly, the contemporary Great Depression can be fought more effectively and safely. People can make money on it without stimulating economy through military demand and triggering a world war. This chance has appeared, quite paradoxically, due to the need for overcoming the ecological barrier to economic growth. It appears that money can be earned here, employment increased and social needs fulfilled. Therefore, we can fight the crisis by creating a higher level of the progress of the global civilization.

It all results in strategies of getting out of the Third Depression, which tend to focus on stifling international conflicts and – which is very important – reducing rather than increasing expenses on wars and armament. The USA, which spends about \$ 700 billion on the above-mentioned purposes (the sum almost equal to the total military spending of the rest of the world), for the first time since the end

of the Cold War cut down military expenses by \$ 78 billion in the 2011 budget. It also plans to freeze them in the following years and to reduce the size of its armed forces (see: Craig Whitlock: “Pentagon to cut spending by 78 billion, reduce troop strength,” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2011).

THREE WAYS OF FIGHTING THE THIRD DEPRESSION

It takes a long time to understand and appreciate the last, but the most important of the above-mentioned determinants. It is reflected in the fact that the theoretical and political programmes to combat the present recession are usually of dual nature.

The first group of solutions aims at revitalising the model of the “abundant society” by stimulating demand at the expense of the growth of public debt, and is prevalent in the US policy, with mediocre effects, though.

The second type of solutions – prevalent in the European Union countries – involves minimizing the role of the “welfare state”, reducing public spending and proclaiming “the age of austerity.”

The alternative third way involves taking advantage of the crisis by creating a more rational model of civilization development than the one commonly defined as the “abundant society.” This new model should be referred to as the “society of rational abundance.”

The first two approaches share the same mistake of trying to “win future wars” or making a “leap in the past.” They do not take into account all the opportunities created by a “leap in the future” with respect to political, demographic, technological and ecological changes in the world.

Both strategies view the ecological conflict as “divine retribution” – which has negative influence on economy and makes it more difficult to overcome the crisis. Thus, environmental issues are often ignored and many decision-makers call for postponing them *ad calendas graecas*.

It is surprising that the countries which have been most heavily hit by the crisis underestimate the fact that in order to survive the Great Depression and avert the danger of the fall of our civilization, we need to overcome the ecological crisis and enter the next stage of development: the civilization of rational abundance. A threat that excessive resource depletion poses to our civilization has been present for quite a while. A number of once splendid civilizations collapsed because they had depleted their natural environment (see: Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Soci-*

eties Choose to Fail or Succeed, 2005; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations. Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*, 2008).

Civilizations of the past were confined to a single island, a part of a continent or a sea or ocean basin. After their fall, new civilizations were formed in other, less exploited areas.

Our modern civilization has a global dimension. Environmental degradation does not bode well for the future. Mass production and consumption patterns defined as the “American way of life” and the “affluent society” – or more precisely, the “prodigal society”, as Andrzej Małkiewicz defined it (in: *Crisis ...*) – which are reinforced by omnipresent advertising leading to the “throwaway consumer society” (as an American scholar Regina Lee Blaszczyk called it in *American Consumer Society, 1865–2005: From Hearth to HDTV*, 2009), lead to the situation in which the Earth’s natural resources will be insufficient to satisfy the needs of this kind of production and consumption. If the American standards of production and consumption were to be followed by the whole mankind, it would require four and a half planets. Before the subprime mortgage crisis, the American individual consumption had been seven times bigger than in China – reaching this level by other countries in the world is economically unreal and would lead to an ecological disaster, resulting in the collapse of the global civilization.

All those issues are commonly known. Until recently it was pointless to remind them as people did not want to consume less (and pollute less), and manufacturers were not willing to reduce production and increase costs due to the need for abiding by ecological requirements.

THREE TOOLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The process of becoming aware of the threats caused by the ecological conflict was rather slow as long as it emphasized its negative aspects and focused on moralizing. Only two “tools” for making people change their attitude and actions were used: a “stick” and an “aspergillum” (this idea is borrowed from Andrzej Kołakowski, PhD).

Using a “stick” involves disseminating knowledge about perilous effects of environmental degradation and forcing limits on the exploitation and pollution by means of law regulations and prohibitions – which is becoming less and less effective in the conditions of the Great Depression.

Using an “aspergillum” involves moralizing appeals for moderation out of concern for the fate of humanity, future generations and dying species. This tool

was not only used by scientists, but also by politicians. However, it was ineffective as well, the best example of which was the programme of the “moral equivalent of war” proposed in 1977 by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who wanted to have the American defense industry invest in clean technologies and renewable energy sources.

Both tools – “a stick” and an “aspergillum” – were used out of noble intentions but they failed to serve their task, which I emphasized in a number of books on these issues (see: *Bariera aspiracji*, 1982; *Szanse i zagrożenia*, 1986; *Jaki rozwój*, 1987).

The situation improved when the existing tools were backed by another one, i.e. a “carrot” - which involves economic benefit from replacing “dirty” technologies – which deplete and devastate our planet’s natural environment – with the “clean” and “renewable” ones. This new tool made pro-ecological actions not only wise and noble, but also profitable. Andrzej Lubawski says that “in the battle for climate a lot of new technologies appear in the field of renewable energy sources. At present, instead of emphasizing the need for saving climate, Europe focuses on finding ways of making money on it. China and India, with the growing middle class, are also beginning to treat this issue more seriously, which translates into the increased demand for energy.” (Andrzej Lubawski, “Prognoza na 2011 rok: Zapiąć pasy – będzie huśtać”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 20, 2010).

The capitalist market economy is governed not only by moral or social values, but also by the law of the extended reproduction of capital, which makes a capitalist enterprise a two-wheeled vehicle – it has to move fast forward because if it slows down, it will inevitably collapse, making room for more efficient competitors. Only the person who can accumulate their wealth and compete effectively with other market participants can be called a true capitalist. The ultimate winner is neither the person who has power – it was the case in the times of slavery and feudalism – nor the one who is morally right – which was enough in the systems dominated by religion. It is the person that has the ability to earn more than others that will emerge victorious.

CHALLENGES OF THE POSITIVE STAGE OF THE GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

All premises of reorientation from overconsumption and prodigality, typical of the society of abundance, to the economy which is friendly to present and future generations and which does not harm environment have developed throughout

long decades. They were not only virtual – in the form of theoretical ideas and suggestions – but have also become real: in the form of new technologies, enterprises which apply them and policies of governments and international institutions which support and promote such types of progress.

The need for a wider use of these opportunities arose as a result of the contemporary Great Depression when the traditional means of fighting a crisis (increasing production and demand – both civilian and military) had become ineffective. The pro-ecological reorientation of enterprises and countries appears to be necessary and likely to bring financial, political and social benefits. The economic landscape is beginning to change and we are entering a new stage in the development of the global civilization – **the society of rational abundance**.

I realize it sounds less attractive and spectacular than the “affluent state” or the “society of affluence,” but it realistically defines the positive meaning of the next stage of the democratic free-market civilization which follows three previous phases.

The history of the mankind shows that those systems which were able to overcome their internal crises through adapting their goals and adjusting the behaviours of interdependent societies have contributed more to increasing the level of satisfaction from life. Social systems do not usually stay uniform for their whole life. They transform as new opportunities come up and the need for the civilization development arises. On the basis of general characteristics of these processes, four stages of the development of social formations, each of them more functional than the previous one, can be distinguished:

BARBARIAN, which create a more effective and better organized formation not only owing to their higher efficiency, but also as a result of wasteful exploitation of the resources of weaker communities, which function according to previous rules. Such were the beginnings of both the slave system and the feudal civilization. Capitalism also involved industrial production and market exchange linked with barbarian colonial conquests and global plunders, the reestablishment of slavery, and ruthless exploitation of labour force

DRAMATIC, which are full of internal social conflicts, often quelled through channelling aggression to external wars. In case of capitalism, this stage refers to the era of wars for the division of the world territories – from the Spanish-American War, through the Boer Wars, the Russo-Japanese War, the Sino-Japanese Wars, the Italo-Abyssinian Wars, to the two most dramatic and tragic World Wars.

ROMANTIC, which are “golden age” characteristics of a given civilization system – they are marked by uncontrollable exploitation of the natural environment and blind belief in uniqueness, universality and eternity of this development

model. In capitalism, this stage falls on the period of the Second Industrial Revolution, corresponding to the latter part of the 19th century. It was the time of very fast economic growth, growing popularity of the consumerist model of the “abundant society” and democracy, which breaks the constraints regarding class, ethnic group, minority (e.g. homosexuals) and majority (women) considerations. What was also important, it effectively and peacefully eliminated the communist alternative to the democratic-market system.

POSITIVIST, achieved by those systems which were able to overcome crises resulting from excessive pride and extravagance, typical of the romantic stage, through more rational formulation of goals and ways of achieving them. From what we know about human history, Ancient Greece was the only civilization which reached this level of “peaceful cohabitation” of the society and the natural environment and which managed to balance material wealth with cultural values. This stage seems to be a great challenge for the democratic-market system.

History also shows us that the development to a higher stage of each formation is not voluntary but is determined by the evident crisis of the old formula of goals and methods. There is also a demand for people who are interested in progress and are brave enough to challenge *status quo*.

When there are no forces which forge ahead with modifications, the system falls into conservative stagnation. One way out could be to move the centre of the civilization established in this system to another region or country. However, it may also end with the collapse of the whole system, and the subsequent fall of its civilization. The recent example is the fact that the civilization of the so-called real socialism went through just two full stages: the barbarian and the dramatic one. It collapsed when it was trying to come up with the socialist version of the romantic stage – the attempt to “catch up with and overtake” capitalism in the era of Khrushchev and Gierek. It provided double delegitimation of the system alternative to capitalism. Firstly, because of its blind imitation of capitalism – “catching up with and overtaking” the rival in turning nature into goods – it betrayed its historical mission, which consisted in establishing social order which would lead to finding a “true solution to the conflict between the man and the man as well as between the man and nature.” (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 1844). Secondly, because it was not able to fulfil illusory promises and real hunger stimulated by the model of the “affluent society.” All this made the system lose its initial impetus and its role as the model to follow for other societies. As a result, the system disintegrated and collapsed – fortunately, in a peaceful way (see: Mariusz Gulczyński, “Dlaczego krach socjalizmu i restauracja kapitalizmu”, *Dziś. Przegląd Społeczny*, no. 6, 1991).

The main strengths of the capitalist civilization are innovativeness of production and market impetus, which gave it a global character.

Its weaknesses include two kinds of limitations. Although it was more economically effective and socially attractive than all previous civilizations, it did not bring benefit to: 1) the whole nations and 2) all nations.

The first of these limitations is reflected in the fact that the wealth of the privileged minority contrasted with the poverty of the majority of most capitalist societies, which resulted in class struggle and anti-capitalist revolutions in the first half of the 20th century. Not only did they threaten the functionality of the whole system, but also endangered its further existence.

Capitalism created a new, romantic version of the civilization progress: the “affluent state” and the “state of abundance,” thanks to which it managed to avert the above-mentioned dangers and gained new impetus and strength. The system became more democratic and it benefited from the increased consumer demand. It won this round “hands down” not because it “dug in on its established positions,” but because it made a “leap in the future.”

The second of the limitations mentioned above turns out to be a lot more difficult to solve. Decolonization was a necessary, but insufficient step. It gave people hopes that they could reach the same living standard as in the former metropolis – but it was impossible to achieve.

Although this new, romantic version of the “affluent society” and the “state of abundance” is commonly desirable, it cannot be easily implemented and – which is becoming increasingly relevant – it can be dangerous to the environment. Thanks to the information revolution, people all over the world have better access to knowledge and they want to reach the living standard enjoyed by the citizens of highly developed countries. However, most underdeveloped countries do not provide possibilities of satisfying those needs. The revolution in transport is conducive to the increase in migration – not only legal, but also illegal.

There is growing criticism of the enclaves of “abundance,” which separate themselves from wide areas of “dissatisfaction,” which threaten their complacency. It gave fuel to social frustration and destructive activities, involving the negation of traditional values and pointless attacks, which only aim at “spoiling others’ fun,” which one cannot accept and adapt to.

The Great Depression shows that developed countries will find it difficult to maintain the social consensus based on accepting the fruits of the “society of abundance” and the “affluent society.” Those fruits are available only to a narrow group of the rich, whereas the social “state of affluence” is shrinking rather than increasing in size.

Therefore, in order to understand the essence of contemporary threats, we cannot view them only from the perspective of today's crisis. Fighting the contemporary, multi-level depression requires looking at it from the historical point of view as only this spectrum helps to realize that the uncontrollable desire to turn nature into goods, which is characteristic of "affluent societies," and the Third Great Depression are not an absolute threat. They repudiate the democratic-market model of civilization, but not its romantic variant.

This approach lets us recognize that those threats are not only of a negative nature, but they could also lead to new opportunities. They give us a chance of saving everything that is the most valuable and most functional in the democratic-market system. We will have to abandon the illusory and crisis-prone "affluent society" and force changes, which will lead to the formation of the fourth, positive stage – rational abundance, which does not degrade the environment and which will spread across the whole world. These are the prerequisites for the survival and the peaceful development of the global civilization.

TEN CURRENTS OF THE PRO-ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

There is no doctrine or ideological schedule concerning the development of another stage of our global civilization. The content and form of on-going changes may be deduced from multiple indications of practical innovation in different countries and companies. This goes in accordance with the features of the capitalist system – its energy and strength stem from, among other things, pragmatism. New, functional and progressive ideas are a result of effective practical innovations rather than sophisticated theories.

I believe that there are ten main currents that determine strategies of managing the contemporary financial crisis and the ecological conflict. As the result of their implementation the rational abundance of societies will grow and, consequently, a new stage in the development of the global civilization will be formed. For the sake of remembering I defined them as 10 innovative Rs:

REGENERATION – renewable sources of "clean" energy (wind power, solar power, hydropower and biomass energy). It is not just an experiment any longer but a large investment, especially in China, which is the world leader in this field – in 2009, the Chinese government invested \$34.6 billion dollars in clean, renewable energy, which is almost twice as much as the USA. Other countries are also trying to keep up with this trend – for example, Google Inc. said it would invest in

a \$5 billion underwater transmission network that can harvest electricity from wind farms off the Mid-Atlantic coast and power 1.9 million homes from New York to Norfolk. This way of thinking has also reached Poland, which is also starting to invest in windmills. Not only does this type of development bring benefits to the natural environment, but it also creates new jobs – in 2009, three million people were employed in this industry, including 700,000 employees in China (Reuters, October 6, 2010).

RECYCLING –processing used products instead of turning nature into goods. It is also becoming increasingly profitable – industrial recycling of plastic proves to be a lot cheaper as it requires below 10% of the energy needed to make this product out of crude oil. It is worth noting that although technology was created in America, there is only a laboratory which employs 25 people there, and its industrial application was possible in the European Union countries (Austria and the United Kingdom) and China, where there already exist law regulations which stimulate collecting and recycling this type of waste. In the USA, lobby groups are starting to call for the introduction of regulations similar to those already implemented in the European Union, Japan and China (Thomas L. Friedman, “Aren’t We Clever?,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2010). The UN programme stipulates that common use of recycling in all possible fields of manufacturing, common use of renewable energy sources as well as energy-saving production and consumption should lead to the development which would not deplete the Earth’s resources. It is the only way as the only alternative involves our planet becoming completely barren and, consequently, destroyed.

RECUltIVATION of the planet’s nature – which is more and more often motivated by the need for profitability as the ruined ecosphere increases the illness rate among people and decreases a crop of plants which require pollinating by insects and birds fighting vermin. This path of development not only involves restraining from making the Earth barren, but it also aims at restoring its lush, natural diversity and vitality. This is actually the same strategic change which occurred in the beginnings of industrialization in the area of land cultivation – replacing primitive leaching of soil with renewing its fertility in accordance with the principle of “power determines efficiency.” It means that people have drawn the right conclusions and realized that they cannot endlessly use the Earth’s resources without thinking.

RATIONALIZATION of fulfilling needs, e.g. through improving public transport, which is part of the Chinese transport development schedule, according to which within the next 25 years the Chinese are going to build a network of ultra-

modern airports, 42 ultrafast (over 300 km/h) railways and replace combustion cars with electric ones. It appears to be more effective as every 18 months the costs of using such a car become twice lower owing to increased size and lower prices of electrical batteries – which may be charged from renewable sources.

REDISTRIBUTION of capital by the country and the European Union. Wealth concentration appears to be crisis-prone as the richest people do not create consumer demand for mass products. The argument that they invest surpluses is wrong because they tend to invest where labour force is cheaper – abroad or in the speculative financial capital. This is proved by the fact that crises occurred in the USA – both in 1929 and 2008 – when the wealthiest 1% of people generated a quarter of the country's income, and the top 10% earned half of it. In the times of economic prosperity, it was the middle class that had the highest share in the wealth of the country. Progressive taxation introduced after the Great Depression causes the dispersion of wealth which resulted in the formation of a strong middle class. In the past 35 years, America has made some changes in taxes which led to the situation in which 1% of the richest Americans own 1/3 of the country's wealth and 80% of the US citizens possess just 16% (Ray D. Madoff, "Give Up on the Estate Tax," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2010). The right remedy could be progressive taxation – accompanied by the investment of public money in innovative technologies, education and scientific advancement rather in welfare (benefits and early retirement). Such reorientation has become necessary also for political reasons. In China, where the concentration of wealth has reached an even more extreme level than in the USA – 1% of the richest families own 41.4% of private wealth – unequal income distribution is viewed as the main threat to social order. Thus, the task of fighting anti-egalitarian tendencies is one of the main goals of the Five-Year Plan for the years 2011-15 (Chen Weihua, "Income Gap, a Woe for China and US," *China Daily*, October 12, 2010).

REDUCTION of military demand and war involvement. This is quite a new thing in the history of crisis management. The world's superpowers used to fight crises by stimulating economy with consumer and military demand. This has changed due to a number of reasons. First of all, wars of today are not fought by armies of conscripted citizens, but small troops of professionals. Moreover, both Russia and the USA repeatedly lose against guerilla forces from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq or Chechnya. What is important, during this depression the demand for armament is falling (in 2009, the defense industry revenues decreased by 1/3 in relation to the previous year). All this makes problems connected with war less important than other issues in the centre of interest of the people of America, Russia, India or China, as well as Europe, including Poland.

REORIENTATION of the goals of economic activity through replacing “the fetish” of GDP (which measures the total value of products and services) with the Net Social Benefit (NSB) (a new measure of economic performance suggested by the Nobel Prize winners Joseph E. Stiglitz and Amartya Sen at the request of French President Nicolas Sarkozy). This new measure also takes into account costs to the environment and shows benefits of satisfying social needs. It differentiates between positive consumption (rational needs) and negative consumption (irrational desires stimulated by advertising). This direction of development is also included in the policy of the Communist Party of China, which defined it – in accordance with traditional Confucian values – as aiming at “xiaokang” (moderately well-off society). Rather than focusing on imitating foreign and devalued patterns of development, the Chinese view the process of the advancement of their country as fierce competition with other nations trying to adapt to changes in the global economy. They realize that the only alternative is regression. (Zheng Quinyan, “Strive For a Brighter Future,” *China Daily*, October 23, 2010). This is not just a statement of short-term policy, but the expression of traditional Chinese understanding of the word “crisis.” – shown by two ideographs: “weī” (threat) and “jīn” (opportunity for development and progress).

REVITALISATION of democracy. Democracy involves linking the right to do decide with the responsibility for the effects of one’s decisions. If we confine ourselves to the economic aspects of the ecological conflict and the Third Great Depression we may fail to notice the fact that their underlying cause is the erosion of democracy. Over the last fifty years, the processes of democratization in the political sphere have emphasized the right to choose governments. In the economic sphere, they focused on replacing the legitimization of rule by “providing” means of existence, which was characteristic of autocratic systems, with “voting” through purchasing goods and service, which marks market democracies. It was a significant step forward although it also led to the degeneration of democracy and, consequently, the crisis of the system. It was conducive to the oligarchization of political and economic power – elites concentrated on their own interests and problems instead of serving the society. People were not motivated to take citizens’ responsibility – both for choosing and scrutinizing those in power and for the effects of their economic decisions. It results in low turnout in elections as well as in purchasers not taking responsibility for the effects of excessive consumption, which degrades and pollutes the natural environment (at present, this problem manifests itself in conflicts over landfill sites and waste utilization). Not only are people becoming aware of this crisis-prone deviation of democratic systems, but they are also undertaking some practical steps in order to fight them. These meas-

ures include pro-ecological social movements, forwarding proposals to increase the influence of citizens on the executive power, and launching referendums on the most important, controversial issues.

REGIONALISM – in other words: glocalization, defined by the slogan: “Think-globally, act locally.” This motto has become a remedy for the threats posed by wild globalization – uncontrolled by any democratic institutions – and a tool for making local communities a part of globalization processes, which involves seizing opportunities created by the global exchange of goods and information in order to modernize and enrich the existence of these communities. The fact that I place regionalism (glocalism) in the final part does not mean that it is less important than the previous aspects. Just the opposite, this approach to handling the crisis is the essence of all the others. Globalization processes lead to an increase in migration – especially from less developed regions to industrialized countries. In the areas where this tendency is dominant, it threatens the global order as it deprives poorer countries of the most valuable professionals – which further impoverishes these regions and increases social tensions. Regionalism offers a positive alternative. It is understood not as conservative separation from the world, but is defined as glocalization: when local communities join processes of civilization progress as partners, being aware of both threats and opportunities connected with globalization. Thus, this thinking focuses on taking advantage of what is positive and neutralizing what is negative – not only from the present point of view, but also having in mind the future interests of a local community. Looking from this regional perspective, both threats posed by the bankrupt model of the “society of affluence” and the values of the “society of rational abundance” become evident. It also emphasizes the relevance of all the paths of civilization progress described above.

A good example is Germany, the economy of which seems to be coping with the crisis better than other countries of Europe and North America. An American commentator explained that the reason is German people’s ability to “link social democratic values with locality.” It is reflected in the fact that private enterprises, which supply foreign markets, are firmly established in specific lands and are serviced by municipal banks. German companies also pay a lot of attention to retaining employees, training them and making them participate in the management process. The same author contrasts this approach with America’s attitude to globalization – focusing on financial speculations and moving production to those parts of the world in which it is easier to make a profit at the expense of social order in the United States (Harold Meyerson, “How Germany got it right on the economy,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2010).

Harbingers of positive regionalism are also appearing in other countries, including Poland. It was evident in the recent elections to local governments – voters preferred those leaders who govern their regions with the interests of a local community in mind. They are often non-party administrators as the interests of party elites often collide with the interests of local people.

REEDUCATION – teaching how to live wisely in the global civilization of rational abundance. I analyzed this significant civilization change in a separate text – *www.Jak uczyć się żyć w epoce globalizacji* – a knol by Mariusz Gulczyński – to which I refer everyone interested.

A common denominator of all the aspects of the changes in the capitalist system is the fundamental shift in the philosophy of the development of the global civilization. The new approach involves being guided by the words “make the Earth friendly” rather than following the guideline “make the Earth yield to you.” It actually means abandoning a “zero-sum game” which was the dominant feature of the development of industrial economy. Like among hunter-gathering barbarian communities, this game led to an increase in economic performance, but simultaneously resulted in resource depletion and environmental degradation. People are now trying to act according to the principles of a “non-zero sum game” – in which the growth of production and consumption changes the shape of the Earth, but *per saldo* it does not degrade the natural environment. Just like Dutch polders or English parks changed the composition of the landscape of those countries, but did not destroy their human-friendly values. Thus, barbaric attitude towards the natural environment transformed into a more civilized one.

Such a shift in the formulation of goals and management methods bodes well for business activity. It gives hope that the quality of people’s existence will not deteriorate and people’s material, intellectual and emotional needs will be satisfied in a more rational and comprehensive way. Sustainable development is not an obstacle or a “JOKE”, but it is a “JOB” – a task and an incentive for more effective, more profitable and more time-consuming entrepreneurial activity.

In order to seize this opportunity, companies, regions and countries need to realize that the Third Great Depression does not only bring threats, but it also has a lot of positives – which make it possible to overcome something that was harmful, unrealistic and dangerous in the previous circumstances of the civilization development.

Instead of using old methods to restore an obsolete formula of the “prodigal society” and defensively “closing down” the “state of affluence,” they need to make a significant “leap in the future” – by formulating and implementing a positive alternative to the civilization of rational abundance.

This alternative is real not because it is motivated by a “stick” of fear of the negatives of the old development pattern and an “aspergillum” of moral duties. It receives an additional incentive – a “carrot” of economic benefits and social peace and order.

We have to definitively say goodbye to the development model of the “society of affluence” – as socially unrealistic and ecologically devastating.

The new stage of the civilization progress has already been heralded with some innovative changes in technology, consumption patterns, use of goods, and formulating goals and measuring performance of companies. What seems just a pipe dream or a temporary fad and a utopia of fanatical ecologists today, may turn out to become “mainstream” – a common fashion of the civilization of rational abundance.

We also need to recognize the fact that great ecological and economic crises have played a positive role in the history of mankind. They made it necessary to make a “leap in the future” by creating more and more effective conditions of human existence. The first evidence is the fact that thanks to a great environmental crisis millions years ago, which made vast parts of our cradle Africa turn into steppe, our ancestors – in order to survive – had to descend from trees, equip themselves in tools, humanize themselves and create increasingly more effective conditions of their existence, i.e. the civilization.

The most notable evidence of the efficiency of this development is the growing rate of survival, i.e. an increase in the size of human population from about five million people in the hunter-gathering stage, through 500 million in the agriculture-craftsmanship period, one billion in the industrial era, two billion in 1930, up to seven billion today.

It is an undisputable fact that so many once splendid civilizations, which conservatively tried to stick to the old development patterns, have collapsed. This is the most dramatic warning against disregarding opportunities for development created by the contemporary ecological and economic crisis.

THREE DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRATIC-MARKET INNOVATION

In order to benefit from the Third Great Depression, we must be aware of the specific values of market democracies. The following two of them have the most significant influence upon the civilization processes analysed here.

The first kind of advantages over other systems is the tendency and ability to introduce innovative changes thanks to economic and political competition – as

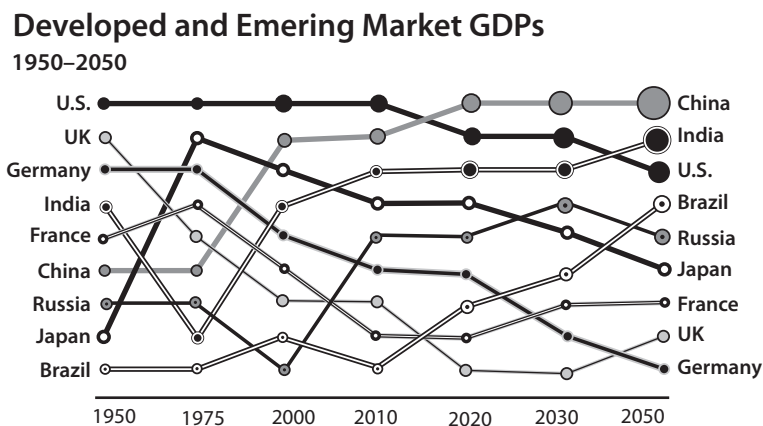
opposed to conservative tendencies of monopolies. This is where the vitality and adaptability of liberal-democratic systems comes from – “permanent effort which has been undertaken for many years, since as early as the 16th century in Europe, thanks to which they are not rigid, self-blocking mechanisms, but an on-going social process, which guarantees flexibility and order, and avoids the rigidity of structure and disorder, which are characteristic of dictatorship.” (Wojciech Lamętowicz, *Paradoksy liberalnej demokracji* [in:] *Interpretacje polityki. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana prof. Mariuszowi Gulczyńskiemu w 80. Rocznicę urodzin*, 2010). These values of market democracies were not appreciated by Lenin, who forecast the fall of capitalism at the imperial stage because of monopolization. Stalin was even more wrong as he monopolized the communist economy and politics and, consequently, blocking any chances of innovation.

China, which effectively stimulates the economic growth thanks to adapting to the principles of market competition, may face the slowdown of its economy unless it links the values of post-Confucian ethos of team-working with innovative characteristics of democracy. This task will probably be much more difficult to complete than fast transformation from centrally planned economy to free market. There is also strong resistance to the adaptation of democratic patterns, the source of which lies not only in strong monocratic traditions in China. These traditions are more acceptable by the Chinese society as they have a long history and are free of the tendency to gerontocracy, with the helm of the state handed over to new generations of “mandarins,” which is to a certain extent conducive to linking continuity with innovativeness (see: *Dalekowschodnie systemy polityczne* [in:] Mariusz Gulczyński, *Panorama systemów politycznych świata*, 2004). In the light of experience of other hastily democratized countries, the Chinese authorities are quite unwilling to blindly copy the Western model of democracy. They fear that it may result in replacing the Confucian ethos of discipline and team-working with overweening individualism and freedom understood as freedom from obligations and shared responsibility. “It is not quite true that China rejects all Western values, such as democracy – they just debate over them” – this is a conclusion of *The Economist* editorial, which introduced a series of articles on this issue (“The Debate over Universal Values,” September 30, 2010). It must be noted that thirty years ago this magazine forecast the advent of the post-Confucian era in the global civilization (R. McFarquar, “The Post-Confucian Challenge,” *The Economist*, February 2, 1980).

The other source of the vitality and innovativeness of the democratic-market democracy is its tendency and ability to move its centre to new regions of the world. This is a huge advantage of market economies as previous civilizations col-

lapsed when their centres lost vitality – Babylon, Alexandria, Rome, Cuzco, Angkor or Byzantium. The most recent evidence is the fall of the communist system, which lost its innovative qualities and went bankrupt mainly because of Moscow blocking the spontaneous movement of its leading centre. Beijing, which competes for this role with Moscow, benefits thanks to changing its system into the competitive one. This trend lends credence to the possibility of the fall of our global civilization – following the example of past superpowers, which collapsed due to the loss of innovation capabilities of their centres.

In capitalism the centre moved from mainland Europe to Great Britain in the 19th century, and then to the USA in the following century. In our times – it is probably shifting to China, India, Brazil, the RSA... or to a wider, multi-state centre. It is less likely to move to BRIC (Brazil-Russia-India-China), which some experts have already proclaimed the new centre of the world. It is more likely to become located in the conglomerate of countries surrounding the Pacific Ocean – from the West Coast of the United States to South-East Asia and Australia. This thesis is supported by the recent trends in the global economy, defined in the chart published in *The Wall Street Journal* on October 10, 2010.



Source: Credit Suisse

It clearly shows that the USA and the most developed European countries are beginning to lose their leading positions. An American feature writer quotes opinions of Indian people on this issue: “But the U.S. seems sadly unprepared to take advantage of the revolution it has spawned. The country’s worn-out infrastructures, failing education system and lack of political consensus have prevented

it from riding a new wave to prosperity.” (Thomas L. Friedman, “It’s Morning in India,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2010).

This was and is painful for the countries losing their leadership, like for the Netherlands and France, which had to give up their positions in favour of the British in the past, and the British themselves, who were overtaken by the United States. In our times this is probably a bitter pill for the Americans, who have already become used to thinking their country is the leading world superpower. They are gradually becoming aware of the fact that America no longer marks out paths and standards of development for others to follow. It is reflected in the opinion poll which indicates that 65% of the U.S. citizens believe that their country is degrading (David Brooks, “The Genteel Nation,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2010). It also brings discomfort to other nations, which are used to perceiving the USA as the model of advancement and their main ally in developing a favourable version of the world order. It particularly affects India, the dynamic development of which was significantly determined by its close links with the United States, which supported the New Delhi government in its difficult relations with conflict-prone Pakistan and dominant China (Nyan Chanda, “The Third Revolution. The US Seems Unprepared to Take Advantage of the Silicon Valley Revolution It Has Spawned,” *Businessworld*, November 8, 2011).

The reason for such a significant advantage of the democratic-market civilization over the previous one is the fact that it is winning the free market rivalry that determines the leadership position of both companies and countries. The main centre of innovation and development patterns is shifting to new parts of the world when the established leader falls into stagnation. It usually becomes a “prisoner” of the manufacturing and consumption model which laid foundations for its success. As a result, it loses its competitiveness and innovativeness in favour of other centres, which were less successful in the past, but also less fossilized and more inventive.

The countries which joined the democratic-market “race” later – new, emerging economies – have a “latecomer advantage:” although they are less developed, they are free of devalued technologies, management methods and consumption patterns characteristic of advanced countries. That is why the centre of the global capitalist civilization is shifting to new regions.

Originally, in the 18th century and in the early 1900s, the leading position in the world market was occupied by the countries of mainland Europe – north Italy, the Netherlands and France, which supplied their own markets and the elites of the rest of the world with their luxury products.

Great Britain was able to take over the leadership role thanks to flooding the world markets with cheap textiles, mass produced by steam-powered industry.

In the 20th century, the United States gained and maintained the position of the global leader owing to mass production of oil-fuelled vehicles – cars, aeroplanes and ships – not only civilian, but also military ones, which was stimulated by the need for defending democracy. That need was justifiable during both World Wars, but with time it became a tool for stimulating economy, used not only for defending democratic governments, but also for supporting dictatorial pro-American regimes. The old saying “they may be sonofabitches, but they’re our sonofabitches”, which was first used in the era of neo-colonial American expansion, is still up-to-date. There are indicators that today the USA is becoming a “prisoner” of the devalued “engine” of its economy. The clear evidence is a \$60 billion Saudi arms deal – in return for crude oil. It contrasts with the fact that the promotion of renewable energy sources was limited to just one Congress directive, in accordance with which the U.S. government was to approve wind, solar and other projects on public land. However, “the Interior Department had approved more than 73,000 oil and gas leases since 2005, but only one offshore wind energy project and not a single solar project.” (“Remember Renewable Energy?” *The New York Times*, October 27, 2010). It is the evidence that the USA is becoming a “prisoner” of a degrading – and ecologically devastating – generation of technology and demand patterns, due to which it “condemns itself” to losing the leading position in the world.

The contemporary China seems to be the keenest to step into the breach in the new stage of the civilization progress. Although this superpower is one of the biggest “devastators” and “polluters” of the natural environment, not only do its leaders admit it, but they are also making efforts to implement sustainable development. China invests the money it earned as a “cheap factory” of the world in the economic growth based on renewable energy sources, recycling and disruptive technologies because, as the leader of the German Green Party Joschka Fischer indicated, they have to. When the PRC increased resource-intensive production and consumption, it soon encountered – because of the size of its population - the barrier to economic growth, with disastrous ecological, social and political consequences (Joschka Fischer, *China as Superpower*, Project Syndicate, 2010). That is why China is now “changing from the factory of the world to the clean-tech laboratory of the world” (Thomas L. Friedman, “Aren’t We Clever?” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2010). “If America opts, for the first time in history, for nostalgia and ideology instead of pragmatism and progress, then the new model of capitalism will probably be made in China, like so much else in the world these

days”(Anatole Kaletsky, “Blaming China Won’t Help the Economy,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2010).

India, which now holds the second position, is ready to challenge the leader. What increases its chances is its higher intellectual potential than that of China, strong ties with the Anglo-Saxon culture, and the very fact that they enter this “race” from the position just behind the leader.

Europe – even as the European Union – stands no chance. It is too deeply “imprisoned” in the past generation of technology and consumption patterns. It is also too closely linked to the United States and its consumption patterns and approach to military safety to become a strong contender in this race.

It is also almost certain that no Islamic country will join the world leaders. They are too busy trying to handle conflicts to play a constructive role in solving crisis-prone issues of the present and past. These conflicts include both internal clashes, such as the one between the Shia minority and the Sunni majority, and the ongoing argument with the Israeli enclave, which separates itself from its neighbour with a concrete wall, assuming the role of a hostile body in this conflict-prone region. They also lead endless disputes with Russia in the South Caucasus and defend their Islamic values against the “American way of life.” However, what they beat more developed societies with is their twice as high demographic growth. Along with mass migration, it may be the indication of their more significant role in the future development of the global civilization.

CHANGES IN THE FORMULA OF “SOFT POWER” AND ITS EPICENTRES

Countries which aspire to the leading position may become leaders of the new stage of the civilization progress but it is not enough to stimulate economic growth, increase military power or technological innovativeness. They can achieve this goal only if they consistently link innovative economic growth with the formulation of functional patterns of consumption and social order, which will be attractive for other countries of the world.

The experience of past leaders shows that the top position is not gained by means of “hard power” – using military and economic coercion to influence others – or not even with the use of “clever power” – which refers to influencing others through technological innovativeness and economic proficiency. The key to success is “soft power” - the ability to obtain what one wants through co-option

and attraction. The history of shifts of the global economic epicentre is in fact parallel to the history of changes in lifestyle fashion – from the Italian and French culture, through everything that is British, up to the “American way of life,” which has dominated the past few decades. Broadly defined culture – as a system of values and a way of life – plays a key role in piloting, spreading and consolidating popularity and influence of products, companies, brands and countries (Lawrence E. Harrisom, Samuel P. Huntington (ed.), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, 2003). It is the essence of “soft power” as it makes other countries voluntarily accept and imitate lifestyle models of new epicentres – “capitals of the world.”

When we observe the process of shifting the epicentre of the capitalist civilization, it becomes evident that each new “fashion” concerning the consumption of material goods and culture, lifestyle and the shape of social relations becomes increasingly available. The original Italian and French patterns used to be accessible only to elites. The subsequent models were more and more egalitarian and democratic. Not only are they admirable, but also widely imitable – attracting more and more nations and increasingly wide parts of their societies to this fashion’s sphere of influence, including market economy and ideology.

The original epicentre gained its pattern-making position by manufacturing and trading handmade luxury goods – Italian faience, Netherlandish brocade, velvet and laces, French fashionable apparel and German coaches. Those products were unquestionably elite, but more widely available than previous craft goods, not only in royal courts and to aristocracy, but also to minor landowners, who bled their serfs dry in order to be able to afford such luxuries, as well as to *nouveau riche* from outside nobility. They were accessible not only in the places of manufacture, but in the whole world.

The fact that the pattern-making epicentre moved to Great Britain meant that more available, mass produced goods, especially textiles, came into fashion. They supplanted French luxury items not only thanks to their low price and wide availability, but also due to ostracism against those who wore French or Dutch style clothes, which was quite common in Britain. The history of culture knows cases when people were publicly stripped off their foreign garments – more attractive and elegant than tacky, mass produced, domestic clothes – which was then destroyed.

The real reason for the Napoleonic Wars was to stop an influx of British goods to continental Europe as they were increasingly competitive to French products. The main motive behind the tragic military expedition to Russia was the Tsarist government’s refusal to impose an embargo on English goods.

We are relatively well aware of the reasons for which America took over the role of the global epicentre. The driving force of progress was a mass produced, cheap car, the availability of which, along with mass production of other goods – jeans, Hollywood movies, Coke and fast-food – resulted in the creation of the affluent lifestyle of the American middle class – the consumerist “American way of life.” This lifestyle soon spread across the whole world. Until recently, almost everyone tried to wear something American, designed their flats or houses and entertained in the American way. Jeans have become a “national garment” of Poles – when I was abroad, was it Beijing or, paradoxically, New York, I recognized fellow countrymen by the jeans clothes they were wearing.

These times seem to belong to the past now. And they are probably gone for ever. Today, there is plenty of evidence that what Americans once gained owing to the attractiveness of their “affluent society” model, they are now losing because of replacing it with the pattern of the “abundant society.” Wide availability of the “American way of life” standard, in accordance with the democratic ethos, is now becoming devalued due to the differentiating pursuit of prestige luxury.

The Third Great Depression revealed that Americans – and not only them – have lost moderation. They replaced the rational model of consumption with the irrational one, which focuses on satisfying not only rational needs, but also irrational desires. It was Keynes who warned against the implications of such economic deviation. “Now it is true that the needs of human beings may seem to be insatiable. But they fall into two classes - those needs which are absolute in the sense that we feel them whatever the situation of our fellow human beings may be, and those which are relative in the sense that we feel them only if their satisfaction lifts us above, makes us feel superior to, our fellows. Needs of the second class, those which satisfy the desire for superiority, may indeed be insatiable; for the higher the general level, the higher still are they” (John Maynard Keynes, *Economics. Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, [in:] *The Collected Works of J. M. Keynes*, v. 9: *Essays in Persuasion*, 1972).

The contemporary crisis reveals the negative aspects of business activity aimed not only at satisfying rational needs, but also at the escalation of desires – rational and irrational ones from the perspective of the needs of human existence and ecological requirements. The economic growth is boosted through stimulating the average consumer to desire goods which they hardly need.

“Maybe the first decade of the 21st century will come to be known as the great age of headroom. During those years, new houses had great rooms with 20-foot ceilings and entire new art forms had to be invented to fill the acres of empty overhead wall space.

People bought bulbous vehicles like Hummers and Suburbans. The rule was, The Smaller the Woman, the Bigger the Car — so you would see a 90-pound lady in tennis whites driving a 4-ton truck with enough headroom to allow her to drive with her doubles partner perched atop her shoulders. When future archaeologists dig up the remains of that epoch, they will likely conclude that sometime around 1996, the U.S. was afflicted by a plague of claustrophobia and drove itself bankrupt in search of relief” (David Brooks, “The Gospel of Wealth,” *The New York Times*, September , 2010).

The American society is flexible, easily adapting to changes – as they have proved on a number of occasions in the past. This adaptability is a credit to America’s multiethnicity and multicultural character – aided and stimulated by a permanent influx of immigrants. This is where a chance of recovery lies – after abandoning unreflective overconsumption and prodigality. The current crisis offers a chance of leaving a dead end. “it might be the right time to shun the throwaway culture and return to the idea of a family “treasure box” (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, “End of the Throwaway Culture,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2010).

However, from what we know about the inertia of such social processes, Americans may not be strong and persistent enough to fully get rid of the habits obtained in the era of “abundance,” “prodigality” and “throwaway culture.” Thus, they might not be able to create a model of rational abundance, which could spread across the globe.

This model has to meet new requirements in terms of quality – it needs to take into account a higher standard of attractiveness and availability. The previous model involved satisfying aspirations of only developed nations, whereas the new pattern has to take all countries into consideration – in accordance with modern requirements. Decolonization, the globalization of the market, information and democracy stimulated the societies which used to be enslaved and vegetating. Now they are joining the wave of the civilization progress. It requires standardizing progressive changes in politics and economy, so that they will be attractive and available to all nations.

Based both on logical premises, and on increasingly rich information, we can risk a statement that the new generation of models will not be conceived in any of the previous epicentres of “soft power.” It may be formed as a result of the practical experience of the societies which are presently joining the new stage of the civilization progress. It is most likely that it will be India and China.

India has a huge advantage of being an efficient, dynamically growing market democracy. Let me describe just one of numerous examples of innovative activity

in this country. An American columnist was fascinated with a completely new idea of providing banking services. Instead of extending a network of ostentatiously impressive locations, which is a real plague in Polish cities, small mom-and-pop kiosks selling a variety of items were turned into virtual banks, which are linked in the system and make it possible for people to make basic financial transactions. "The whole system is being run out of a little house and garage with a dozen employees" (Thomas L. Friedman, "Do Believe the Hype," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2010).

China may win this race thanks to the fact that it has a long tradition of planning social processes centrally. The Middle Kingdom has already proved its efficiency in planning demographic processes and it is likely to effectively introduce social changes in future. It particularly concerns the creation and implementation of the model of the "society of rational abundance" included in the next Five-Year Plan.

Both of these emerging economic superpowers may become a consumption model to follow. The level of this consumption will be lower than in the times of the "affluent society," but at least it will be commonly available and more rational – not prodigal. Both India and China may serve as examples of the development which is more adequate for other "emerging" markets. They have achieved it not only through top-down initiatives - by building great industrial powers - but also through bottom-up initiatives, such as different forms of entrepreneurial, agricultural and service activity in local communities. It may be an alternative to post-colonial countries, which are discouraged to copy their former rulers by negative aspects of past transplantations.

From the European and Polish point of view, following the Chinese, Indian or Brazilian markets may not seem very credible. This perspective does not seem very objective as it is determined – consciously or subconsciously – by an arrogant "superiority complex" of Europeans towards other cultures. The patterns formed by these cultures, however, may become attractive for us if they turn out to be more economically efficient and more effective in fighting illnesses and dead ends of the contemporary civilization. For example, they should create an alternative to air pollution and traffic jams caused by a growing number of cars, which are increasingly bigger in size.

These countries are likely to become the new centre of "soft power" provided they prove they can handle the crisis through a "leap in the future" – by overcoming the ecological barrier to economic growth, a tendency for excessive wealth concentration and for wasteful - "prodigal" and "throwaway" consumption. Instead of using a "stick" of bans and regulations or an "aspergillum" of moralizing appeals,

they should be able to cope with the crisis with the help of a “carrot” – tangible, measurable profits and benefits from the creation, implementation and dissemination of the new stage of the civilization progress, which is more effective than the previous, romantic one.

The history of the mankind shows that the significant driving force of progress is the societies’ optimistic belief in the rightness of the development path they chose. According to the research results quoted by *The Economist* Pew Researcher Centre – 87% of Chinese people, 50% of Brazilians and 45% of Indians are certain that their country is developing in the right direction – compared with 31% of the British, 30% of Americans and 26% of the French (“The Redistribution of Hope. Optimism is on the Move – with Important Consequences for Both the Hopeful and the Hopeless, *The Economist*, December 16, 2010).

The main difference between the old Euro-American world and the new emerging markets lies in the fact that in the former the battle for retaining *status quo* continues, including privileges in a retirement system, and in the latter more emphasis is put on increasing access to higher education and seeking opportunities for change (Iwan Krastew, “Europa: mocarstwo na emeryturze,” *Gazeta Świąteczna*, December 18-19, 2010).

THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLAND AND EUROPE

The Great Depression has been rather an unpleasant surprise for Polish people. After all, now that twenty years have passed since the transformation, we have just caught up with beneficiaries of the capitalist “abundant society.” As soon as we started to enjoy new tastes that had been unavailable to us before, the crisis forced us to “tighten our belts.”

The fact that our country was the least affected by the crisis – after all, Poland still maintains positive GDP growth, being a “green island” among other European countries with “black,” negative economic indicators – does not offer much comfort. The unemployment rate is still around 10% and the percentage of impoverished people is much higher than among our Western neighbours.

The crisis is an ordeal for Europe. We nurtured hopes that the common market potential will effectively stimulate economic growth and will be conducive to eliminating the conflict of interest, resulting in the peaceful coexistence of Europeans. Instead, there is an on-going dispute over who should bear the costs of the crisis and old ethnic conflicts revive.

Both the Poles and other Europeans reacted to the crisis in a spontaneous way – proposing actions that would be a “leap in the past,” which would involve adjusting different versions of the European model of the social “welfare state” or attempting to alleviate the effects of the crisis and to stimulate economic recovery. They hoped they would be able to regain high pace of economic growth, sticking to the goals and methods of the model defined as the “state of abundance,” which means the return to the idea of “turning nature into goods” – with all environmental and social implications.

Europe was a cofounder of the main premises of the global civilization – industrial methods of production, market exchange of goods and democratic politics. The European Union’s economy has the biggest potential in the world – bigger than the economies of the United States and China. Europe is also the main trade partner of China.

It is highly doubtful whether Europe will become the leading centre of the new stage of the civilization progress. Its most economically developed part is too “tied” by the constraints of the previous economic system. However, it does stand a chance to regain the position of one of its politically significant centres. It may be perceived as a source of important values and intellectual and social experience of market democracies – signals of which are already received from China and other emerging markets. As an integrated economic, political and cultural structure, Europe is able to promote innovative progress in all fields of pro-ecological reanimation of economy and to create a new, democratic “society of rational abundance.” Some key aspects of such innovative approach were included in the development plan which became known as the “Lisbon Strategy.”

The above thesis may be supported by the historical regularity that it was not only the leading power that benefited from each new stage of development, but also a number of smaller countries, which were able to find and develop an untapped market niche. The recent examples include Japan, South Korea and Finland, which made efforts to meet demand for consumer electronics - not fully satisfied by the United States, which focused on military and space electronics (I anticipated this in the essay entitled “Luka programowa,” *Kultura*, no. 22, 1968). There is a lot of evidence that among the leaders of tomorrow will be those countries which will be able to overcome a tendency to be “locked” in the devalued generation of technology, economy, politics and consumption patterns, and which will be able to separate themselves from the waning American leader and to consistently link the pro-ecological shift in their economy with specializing in meeting needs of the global market in the fields which have not been tapped by others.

Europe may lose this battle if decentralist tendencies prevail and changes are limited to adjusting the model of the “welfare state” – without strategic investment in innovative paths of the civilization progress.

Poland, which has been relatively successful in fighting the effects of the Depression, pursues a policy of “small steps.” It seems quite right from the tactical point of view, but it does not hold promise for qualitative progress. Like a tailor who patches clothes, we are implementing short-term solutions, without deeper strategic thinking and investing in future. In the long run, however, Poland may win the crisis if it participates in the process of formulating and implementing the strategy of the civilization of rational abundance within the framework of the European Union.

The range and complexity of tasks resulting from the contemporary threats and opportunities lies far beyond the capabilities of not only Poland, but also much bigger countries. The integration with the European Union, however, offers Poland a chance to join and become a participant of these processes. It requires overcoming a spontaneous tendency to restore the old model of the “society of rational abundance,” which has become devalued by the ecological conflict and the Third Great Depression. Together with its European partners, Poland should develop and implement a winning strategy for coping with the crisis by creating more rational goals and methods of the civilization progress.

The EU presidency which Poland took up in July 2011 is a great, historic challenge for Poland and its political, economic and intellectual elites. Poland will be able and will have to support processes of recognizing and seizing opportunities that the ecological and economic crisis creates for the mankind – including Europe and Poland – for the formulation of new, more rational goals and methods of production and consumption.

The future fate of Poland and Europe depends on their ability to face these challenges-tasks. I do not worry about the future of the mankind. I believe people will successfully handle the challenges of today and tomorrow. I would be happy to see Poland and Europe positively contribute to this process. However, unless the present Polish and European political elites cease to focus on their own interests, they will stay out of the mainstream of change. This is not only the battle for survival of the mankind, including European and Polish people. We should also fight for our position in the next stage of the civilization progress: whether we will be in the vanguard or the rear-guard. And whether we will be the cofounders of the civilization of the future or we will lag behind.

CONCLUSIONS

The ecological conflict and the Great Depression have made us aware that the future will not be the end of history, as anticipated by Francis Fukuyama, spreading and copying of the “affluent society” – a romantic version of the democratic-market civilization. It may be and must be a fascinating adventure of writing another chapter of Human History – a positive civilization of rational abundance of the present and future generations of all nations.

It sounds like utopia. However, this is not a fantasy, but sheer reality. It is not based on virtual pipe dreams, but on real innovation programmes, which are already being carried out in different parts of the world.

History shows that people have the courage to pursue higher levels of the civilization progress, which is determined by the need for overcoming crises and is motivated by seemingly utopic visions of changes which increase chances of survival and reaching satisfaction with life.

Winning a crisis in this way was possible in the past. Therefore, it may be and must be possible today.