



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# The Globalization Debate. From “The great Voyages of Discovery” to Post Communism

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### Abstract

For the past decades, globalization has been a hot topic in the international discourse, identified both as a process and a phenomenon. Specialized literature hosts an ongoing debate related to the moment that can be identified as the beginning of what we call “globalization”. But is it possible to identify one single moment in history from when globalization started? In this paper we aim to present the different points of view argued by scientists, and use historical moments that mark the building of relations among states on a global scale, to explain how different parts of the world came to be interconnected at the unprecedented level they are today. Also, we intend to argue in which way the end of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe has influenced the spreading of global links among states.

**Keywords:** *Globalization, international relations, history, Eastern Europe, communism*

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### **Conceptual determinations**

Several issues mark the world we live in, making current times into what will soon be history. Among these, international migration, world commerce, the issues regarding human rights, common international security threats or environmental challenges can be recalled as defining topics for the XXI<sup>st</sup> century's societies. Further research on any of these topics leads to a common ground, represented by the deep interconnections provided by globalization, as they are not anymore individually undertaken by the nation-states, but by the humankind.

The word "globalization" appeared for the first time in the Webster Dictionary in 1961, defining "the beginning of an explicit recognition of the growing signification of the global connection between events and social relations in the contemporary period" (Kilminster, 1997: 257). The use of the term became more and more regular, being used as a common explanation for the evolution of social relations, political and economic developments, being described by authors such as Held as "the cliché of our days: a great idea comprising everything from starting from the global financial markets to the internet, but that offers little understanding on the contemporary human condition" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, Perraton, 1999: 1).

A "phenomenon and a system as well" (Porumbescu, 2008: 239), globalization has been defined in many ways, depending on the perspective of the specialist trying to explain it and use it in a further argumentation. As a phenomenon, it manifests itself by a rapid growth of economic, social and technological changes, represented by the deepening of the connections among states and different parts of the planet. It is also regarded as a historic process in which the state or the national institutions, the authorities, actors and others, are more and more left behind by the global interactions, especially in the economic matters (Lawson, 2010: 153).

The globalization phenomenon, as well as regionalization, has often been recalled as the main transformation factor for the political and economic relations in the contemporary world. Much like a force that transcends the concept "international", based on its classic grounds related to the national-state (as established since Westphalia, 1648), globalization is regarded as an "element that undermines the traditional sovereign state, deleting the importance of frontiers and the power of governments in a Post-Cold War era" dominated by the ever winning capitalism (Lawson, 2010: 32).

Since it was first used, the concept "globalization" became integrated in various field studies, being either an explanation or a consequence of the specific evolutions in said fields (Robinson, 2007: 125). One of the main focus points was the emergence of a globalized economy, which implied the use of new financial tools, new systems of production, wider consumption; another one was the spread of new cultural patterns, thus building on the idea of "global culture(s)". The third one, as some authors argue, consists in the rise of new political processes, the consolidation of democratic regimes, international institutions and organizations, including in the international vocabulary the use of terms such as "global governance". A fourth point of interest was the "unprecedented multidirectional movement of peoples around the world involving new patterns of transnational migration" (Robinson, 2007: 125), thus creating new identities and new types of communities. The fifth domain in which globalization, as a phenomenon, acted was that of the social relations, leading to the creation of new hierarchy.

Globalization is, without doubt, one of the key concepts of the twenty first century's discourse, but it is also one of the most argued and debated. Being given the

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topic of this paper, as well as the space constraints, we will not engage in an epistemological debate on the various determinations of this concept, but will rather engage in discussing the political and normative dimensions of the debate on globalization, referring to the distinct theoretical discourses and timely evolutions in the field. However, it is very difficult to approach globalization without taking into account the conflictive nature of this process.

Maurice Vaisse’s Dictionary of international relations (Vaisse, 2008: 142) defines the term by the global character of certain phenomena, thus calling for the existence of an international authority to find a solution. In building a definition, the concept of “ladder economy” is also being used, as well as the idea that once the Cold War had come to an end, and the bipolar world is gone, the economic liberalism and democracy triumphed and spread across the planet. This is precisely the idea on which we intend to build our argument, scrutinizing the ways in which the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe has impacted the spreading of global ties among countries. Of course, other types of international exchanges are not to be left apart, such as culture, information, technology, turning the world into McLuhan’s “global village” (McLuhan, 1964: 6).

It is not without importance the fact that the bibliographical research on globalization reveals that, however, in various studies, globalization is often associated with expanding worldwide inequalities, new modes of exploitation and domination, displacement, marginalization, ecological holocaust and anti-globalization. As Ritzer argues, “others have trumpeted the process as creating newfound prosperity, freedom, emancipation and democracy” (Ritzer, 2008: 126). But some still choose to highlight the negative outcomes of this deep process of interconnecting world markets, economies and societies. Furthermore, regarding the cultural evolution in different regions of the planet, as well as the evolution of traditional concepts, such as national identity, state sovereignty, or national history, globalization is more often associated with a severely negative, deteriorating influence, as it is assumed to bring along the erase of differences, as a consequence of the spread of globally accepted models and patterns.

Therefore, we can conclude that the nature of the concept of globalization is hard to capture in one commonly accepted definition, taking into account all the different formulated and angled claims that surround this concept in the specialized literature.

### **Theories on the start of globalization**

Being given the disputed nature of the concept of “globalization”, it is in the hands of the scholars from each field of study to try and explain it using specific tools. However, taking into account that this process is not generated by only one aspect of human activity, nor does it have effects on just one, we believe it is best to be approached in an interdisciplinary manner. The study of bibliography on this topic leads to reveals the fact that “the traditional borders between disciplines have become blurred in both theories and empirical studies on globalization” (Robinson, 2007: 128).

In order to succeed in this approach, a historical framing of this process is required. Many of the studies on globalization available in the scientific community start from a common inquiry, trying to identify the historical moment when globalization actually began. While some simply present several alternatives, there are also some scholars that try to argue for one or another moment. In the first category we can include William Robinson, who states that “the rise of globalization studies has served to reassert the centrality of historical analysis and the ongoing reconfiguration of time and space to any understanding of human affairs”. Furthermore, he argues that the way in which we

understand the beginning of this process impacts on the very nature of it, shaping the approach on the concept that is to be used in a study. In supporting his opinion, he introduces the three broad approaches most frequently used: “In the first, it is a process that has been going on since the dawn of history, hence a 5,000–10,000 year time frame. In the second, it is a process coterminous with the spread and development of capitalism and modernity, hence a 500 year frame. In the third, it is a recent phenomenon associated with such processes of post-industrialization, post modernization or the restructuring of capitalism, hence a 20–30 year frame” (Robinson, 2007: 127).

In the other category, Immanuel Wallerstein, among others, believes that “(i)t was in the sixteenth century that there came to be a European world-economy based upon the capitalist mode of production” (Wallerstein, 1974: 67). He also believes that several parts of the world (India, Russia, the Ottoman Empire and West Africa) only became incorporated into this world economy at some point between 1750 and 1850, as the trade in luxury goods which had linked these regions to the core was replaced by trade in bulk goods (Wallerstein, 1989, Chapter 3). In other words, one of the most important ideas that Wallerstein is promoting in his work is that “the current global system polarization stems from the gap between central and peripheral regions” (Ilie, 2014: 232).

However, some of the world historians have gone much further. They argue that “globalization is a phenomenon which stretches back several centuries, or even several millennia”. For instance, according to Andre Gunder Frank, “there was a single global world economy with a worldwide division of labor and multilateral trade from 1500 onward” (Frank, 1998: 52), while Jerry Bentley argues that even before 1500, “trade networks reached almost all regions of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa and large volumes of commerce encouraged specialization of agricultural and industrial production” (Bentley, 1998: 242).

As pointed out earlier, many historians identify the starting point of the globalization process in the events that occurred in 1492, when “Christopher Columbus stumbles on the Americas in search of spices” and 1498, when “Vasco da Gama makes an end run around Africa and snatches monopoly rents away from the Arab and Venetian spice traders” (O’Rourke and Williamson, 2002: 23), referring to the period after 1500 as inaugurating “a genuinely global epoch of world history” (Bentley, 1996: 768-9). According to Adam Smith, cited in numerous works approaching this topic, these were “the two most important events in recorded history” (Tracy, 1990: 3).

Charles Tilly, in his work entitled *European Revolution*, also points out that the end of the XV<sup>th</sup> century was a time of high significance in the history of Europe and the world. Columbus’s expeditions in 1492 were the beginning of placing the Americas under European influence. This expansion was merely a part of Europe’s successful road onto becoming the economic center of the world. Before this, empires had flourished and collapsed in the geographical territory of Europe, especially in the Mediterranean and Black Sea area, but only the Roman Empire has managed to bring together half of Europe, embedding it into the Eurasian commerce, politics and culture system.

Also, as William H. McNeill states, “the year 1500 marks an important turning point in world history ... The European discoveries made the oceans of the earth into highways for their commerce ...” (McNeill, 1999: 295). When referring to the globalization phenomenon as explained in economic facts and terms, Andre Gunder Frank makes a significant remark: “[T]here was a single global world economy with a worldwide division of labor and multilateral trade from 1500 onward” (Frank, 1998: 52). Of course,

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the global economy he was writing about was far from being alike the one we experience nowadays, but one cannot dispute that the routes of modern capitalism were being set.

Later on, the year 1648 also marked a turning point, especially from the perspective of relations among states: the Westphalia Treaty crystalized the shape of the European international society and its dominant entities, which later on used their power and influence to rebuild the global system following their own model (Buzan, Little, 2009: 416).

While most of the scholars study the events from a historical and rather objective point of view, emphasizing on the facts rather than the social and political consequences, pessimists argued that globalization was boxing the world into a ‘global trap’, increasing inequality and undermining the ability of the state to deal with pressing social problems (Martin and Schumann, 1997: 32). Other scholars, such as O’Rourke and Williamson, use economic criteria to measure the influence of globalization. They claim that in order „for globalization to have an independent influence on an economy, two conditions must be fulfilled (...) trade-creating forces must change domestic commodity prices”, and „ the changes in domestic commodity prices must induce a reshuffling of resources in order for trade to influence the things that really matter” (O’Rourke and Williamson, 2002: 26). While not disregarding the importance of the Voyages of Discovery from the XV<sup>th</sup> century for creating the proper outset for create global links among different countries and economies, they conclude their research by stating that globalization did not begin 5000 years ago, and not even 500 years ago, but in the early nineteenth century, thus being, as the authors note, a very modern phenomenon (O’Rourke and Williamson, 2002: 45-47).

### **Modernism and globalization**

Described by most of the scholars as a phenomenon, a process, rather than an event, it seems to be generally agreed that globalization has been developing across centuries, in tandem with rather than as a consequence of the rise of modernity (Robertson, 1992: 8). It is the sociologist Roland Robertson who states that, in a "germinal" European phase (Robertson, 1992: 58), starting in the fifteenth century, ideas about national communities, the individual, and humanity began to grow. The next step in this process, which lasted until the late-nineteenth century, the ideas of global links became more shaped when, for instance, many of the states took part in "international" relations. According to the World Culture Theory, in the critical "take-off" phase, from the 1870s to the 1920s, the main "reference points" of contemporary world society fully crystallized. Several concepts became defining for the global culture, such as the correct kind of national society, the definition and early implementation of individual rights and identities, inclusion of non-European societies in international relations, as well as greater formalization of ideas about humanity (Robertson, 1992: 59). This was also the time when globalization started to be expressed in the continuous increase of transnational linkages and standards. Starting with the 1920s, until after World War II, the global arena was dominated by the attempts of various actors to assume a more important role.

Despite the various points of view regarding the advent of globalization filed above, one must note that the philosophical ideas on global interdependence stretch back for centuries, especially throughout the theories based on a Universalist orientation on humanity. Arguments reinforcing this optics are the examples of ancient Roman or Babylonian empires which practiced various types of long distance commerce and trade. One can conclude that the origins of global economy also date centuries ago, but in the matter of economic globalization, we will support the idea according to which the real

beginning of globalization was in the modern times, once the organizations, conferences, agencies and international regulated trade systems started to develop. The first stage, from the middle of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century until 1870, best described as a phase of “incipient globalization”, we recall as main events: the growth in the formality of international relations by consolidating the sovereign states and system of states, first in Europe and North America, the relations among states being developed by frequent bilateral and multilateral agreements. Also the number of international conventions and agencies directly involved in conducting the relations among states has increased.

The second phase, between the end of the 1870s and 1920, includes a significant increase in the number and speed of worldwide communication, such as telephone, telegraph and radio, as well as the invention of what was to become the base of global transportation, the aero plane. Furthermore, several countries outside of Europe, amongst which Japan, were included in the “international society”. The gold standard was first institutionalized in order to facilitate international monetary transactions, thus leading to massive expansion of capital exports from the western economies and the appearance of multinational companies (Lawson, 2010: 156-157).

The third stage, starting in 1920 and ending in 1960, represents the era when most of the non-Western world was formally affiliated in the globalization network. The events that concluded in such geopolitical shifts were started by the foundation of the League of Nations, followed by the United Nations and its many agencies after the Second World War; the relative downfall of Great Britain and the rise of the United States; the effective globalization of the Cold War and the conflicts it aroused regarding the concepts of modernity and global order. In social and cultural terms, this stage was deeply marked by the appearance of global symbols such as “the Marlboro cowboy” or the opening of the first McDonald’s restaurant in 1955.

The final phase began in 1960 and in ongoing, including a much accelerated expansion in the global means of communication, especially supported by the electronic technology which allows instant virtual transfer of information across the globe. In addition to this, we are witnessing the growth of global influence achieved by financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, used especially to promote liberal economic principles, oriented towards the market. Also, the number of international organizations and institutions has increased very much during the last decades, leading to more social movements and the appearance of a “global civil society” (Lawson, 2010: 158). The emergence of the term “global civil society” can be located at the interstices of two historic developments during the 1990s: the spread of demands for democratization and the intensifying process of global interconnectedness (Held, McGrew, 2003: 559).

Furthermore, international human migration has also registered spectacular increase, including trans-continental migration, bringing along challenges for the mono-cultural states, in the name of multiculturalism. The end of the Cold War, creating a more fluid (and some say more insecure) global system, accompanied by the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, will be further analyzed in the following part of the paper.

All these progress and events led humanity to the point where globalization is regarded as a defining feature of our times. The reaction to this is a consequent growth in the “anti-globalization” movements, which started to appear in the beginning of the 2000s, merging several events, such as top meeting of the World Trade Organization, the European Union or International Monetary Fund, or celebrating various traditions.

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### **The fall of East European communism and globalization**

The dissolution of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe was one of the most significant events in human history and certainly one of the most dramatic ones after the end of the Second World War. Eisenstadt wonders whether these revolutions can “be compared to the “great revolutions” - such as the English civil war, the revolutions in America, France, Russia or China? - which, in many ways, have opened the way for the modern era, creating the global political order?” (Eisenstadt, 1992: 21). Indeed, the international context in which these events have occurred and the economic, social, and political consequences they brought along qualify them into becoming a significant milestone in the history of humankind. As far as the globalization process is concerned, it is without doubt that the fall of communist regimes in these geographical area lead to the opening of former closed, state oriented markets towards the global circulation of capitals, products and services, enrolling these states into the worldwide economy networks.

The year 1989 ended the bipolar system; the possibility that wars would no longer exist between the great powers seemed clear, and the so-called “end of history” occurred, once the old ideological dispute that dominated the XX<sup>th</sup> century whether monarchy, liberal democracy, fascism or communism should model the future of the industrial society was sorted out (Buzan, Little, 2009: 416).

It is sometimes noted that “the rediscovery of the term *civil society* in Eastern Europe in the 1980s was first and foremost a response to the overbearing state and this had resonance in other parts of the world where the paternalism and rigidity of the post-war state was called into question” (Kaldor, 2000: 105-114). But communist societies were always in crisis. “Crisis situations are characterized by uncertainty, abnormality, disrupting the normal work flow, lack of information, sometimes panic, which can damage the quality of information by occurrence of individual "scenarios" aimed to fill the existing gap” (Pogan, 2015: 264). The newly recovered civil society was the one who demanded for personal autonomy and self-organization in societies characterized by growing complexity and uncertainty, and where traditional forms of political organization, notably parties, were no longer the main sites of political debate (Held, McGrew, 2003: 559). Furthermore, individuals gained rights and freedoms that they did not have during the totalitarian regimes. They could now speak up their demands towards the ruling political order, and benefit from the protection and proper representation provided by democratic institutions.

The effects of globalization are most easily perceived in the economic aspects of life, such as trade, commerce, or public access to certain goods and services, due to significant increase in foreign exchanges. As for the attempts to join the world markets, the newly sovereign nations in the East eagerly sought to establish new connections of all kinds to the Western economies. Such steps were welcomed, encouraged and reciprocated both by the United States and key countries in Western Europe. Such examples include from fashion and music to free elections and free trade, the former Eastern Bloc countries reveled in trying to duplicate all things Western in their previously closed societies. Significantly, states such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic or Romania later applied for entry into the European Union and the U.S.-Western Europe military alliance, NATO (Thompson, 2018). This was a clear symbol of these countries' complete repudiation of their former involuntary alliances to the communist Soviet Union, as well as a public statement of their eagerness to become part of the international organizations regarded as stake-holders in matters of global affairs. For the former communist states in

Europe, being a part of the international globalized system meant a better chance for prosperity, economic development and common security.

It is often argued that “the place of states in the international economy and geopolitical relations has a fundamental impact on the way they will react to similar pressures of economic globalization. In the case of Eastern and Central Europe, proximity to and promises of eventual membership in a free trade zone that symbolizes and embodies norms of welfare state provision, parliamentary democracy, and trade openness together facilitated the adoption of like policies in the accession states” (Orenstein, Haas, 2005: 137). These was precisely the rhetoric on which most of the post-communist politicians based their public discourse, events such as accession to the European Union or NATO being regarded and celebrated as great national events.

Some authors argue that the multiplication of sovereign states in Eastern Europe opposes the recent tendencies of forming larger and more compact international communities, towards the separation of capital from the state order and internationalization of economic activities in Western Europe and other areas (Tilly, 2002: 245). However, in the “globalization dispute” the traditional frontiers of the state are no longer recalled as an obstacle in creating world-wide links, but merely a geopolitical conditionality. Modern globalization and the means that support it transcend distance and obstacles, and rather affect national legal systems than being affected by them. After all, globalization has been often claimed to be “in connection with liberalism, whose basic policy is a tripartite of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation”. Globalization is another expression of neo-liberalism in economic policies and its normalization around the world (Yoshikazu, 2010: 1). Besides, there has been noticed a significant tendency of a global governance besides the state directed one, and a multitude of collective identities have emerged.

For the former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, currently members of the European Union, globalization can be seen as having both positive and negative effects. Even the European Union at the time of the development of the current Strategy (Europe 2020) has seen in globalization, along with aging, pressure on the use of resources and economic crisis, “long-term challenges”, “which annihilated substantially the benefits” of the former strategy (Ilie Goga, 2014:197). The newly achieved freedom of circulation within the borders of the European Union encouraged people from Central and Eastern Europe to travel, work, live and study in other European Union member states, leading to a significant increase of the circulatory migration flows. This does not mean only circulation of persons, but also ideas, culture, traditions, know-how, enterprise models or habits, thus leading to the globalization of the societies they originated from.

While numerous issues and problems the world is confronted with nowadays are easier to be solved globally, the *demos*, the citizens, are still confined within a given territorial boundary, facing the need to refer to a certain social, political and normative frame.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the fact that the globalization process routes centuries ago, it is undeniable that without the technologic and communication discoveries of the modernity, we would not be able to discuss issues such as global order, world-wide communication and spread of information, international trade or transcontinental transport.

This paper does not aim at reviewing the benefits or disadvantages of globalization, but rather reviewing the key historical moments that had a significant



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influence on this process. As argued above in the section dedicated to the influence of the fall of communist regimes in Europe on the phenomenon, it is hard to disregard the interconnection between the spread of global connections and the political and economic regimes in different parts of the world. Most of the reviewed literature agrees on the fact that “neo-liberal globalization has caused de-governmentalization and further inter-governmentalization, and has inspired a breaking away from social policy and an internationalization of capital own”. Such is the context in which concepts such as “end of history”, “the global state”, and “denationalization of capitalism” has emerged, under the dynamics of homogenization (Yoshikazu, 2010: 5). We would like to emphasize the idea that the globalization phenomenon is not expressed only in economic, cultural or communication terms, but its effects also spread on the functioning of states and the relations between international actors. The end of the Cold War did not just mean the end of communist regimes in Europe, but, more important, the transition to democracy and capitalism. These are the politic and economic systems that allow borders among states to be more fluid than ever in history, thus easing the access of globalization agents. Worldwide nations are not linked together only by economic ties, but also through international political cooperation in various models and systems, such as the international intergovernmental organizations, making it also impossible to resist foreign influence in all aspects of state matters.

As demonstrated in the first section of the paper, definitions on globalization are numerous and usually differently angled, but a generic way of understanding globalization is to consider it as a “process of creation of a worldwide system in which no event, process or important action remains circumscribed within the geographic area in which it was born. In the same way, events, processes and actions of the global level have an impact, either deliberately or involuntarily, on all the local levels” (Attina, 2009: 50). We may conclude by adding to this explanatory definition that the evolution of such system at a given moment significantly impacts on further or future developments in other geographical or chronological periods. To sum up, it was not the Great voyages of discovery, the technologic revolutions, the spread of long distant means of communication, the generalization of international exchange, or the fall of non-democratic political regimes that determined globalization to occur, but all these events and phenomena are mutually determined, derive from each other, shaping the world as we witness it.

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