

## **IAMCR Conference Closing Session Celebrating IAMCR 60th Anniversary Cartagena (Colombia), 20 July 2017**

**Professor Kaarle Nordenstreng, University of Tampere, Finland**

### **On history of geopolitical changes**

In 1957 the world was quite different. The Cold War divided Europe and the whole world into two camps: the capitalist West led by the United States with President Eisenhower, and the socialist East led by the Soviet Union with Communist Party chairman Khrushchev. These two powers had created military alliances, first NATO in 1949 followed by the Warsaw Pact in 1955, both accumulating conventional as well as nuclear weapons.

Between the two blocs had emerged the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in the so-called Third World, founded by the leaders of Indonesia, India, Egypt, Ghana and Yugoslavia. These were the peak years of decolonization when dozens of French and especially British colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean gained their independence, for example Ghana and Malasia just in 1957, whereas for example Cyprus, Kuwait, Kenya and Jamaica only in the early 1960s. For the Portuguese colonialism it took until the mid-1970s when it yielded independence to Angola and Mozambique.

In the same year 1957 the European Economic Community EEC was founded by the Treaty of Rome as a framework for West European integration. Its counterpart on the Eastern side was a similar structure for economic cooperation, COMECON. The world economy at large was guided by the Bretton Woods system established after World War II with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in practice operating as instruments of the US-led market forces.

Today, 60 years later, the East-West division has disappeared, after the socialist system collapsed in 1989 in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and by 1991 also in the Soviet Union. In this process the former Yugoslavia split into several independent states and the same happened in several former republics of the Soviet Union, from the Baltic to Central Asia, including Ukraine at the heart of Russia.

The world map then was really different from what it is today. And behind the maps everyday life has also changed drastically, with half of world population now residing in cities whereas 60 years ago an overwhelming majority of people on earth were rural dwellers. Living standards have risen with a new middle class growing everywhere, while mass poverty has not been eradicated and the richest one percent now has as much wealth as the rest of the world combined.

These 60 years have also witnessed the emergence of computers and telecommunication not only as infrastructure of the economy and administration but also as pervasive part of modern life. Whether you call it information society or digitalization, it constitutes an historical development of a revolutionary nature.

In short, this has been an exceptionally eventful period of 60 years in world history.

In terms of geopolitics in general, the bipolar world was changed to something that first appeared as a unipolar world around one superpower, the USA. The Western side was largely seen as the winner in the rivalry between socio-political systems and the end of history was declared by some to be at hand. However, Communism had not totally disappeared from the face of the earth; it remained in place in Cuba, North Korea and above all in China.

Moreover, in 2008 another crisis broke out at the heart of capitalism, demonstrating how vulnerable the system was, and 9/11 started a new war against terrorism provoking clashes between civilizations. Ecological problems and climate change also came to be increasingly recognized.

Instead of an idyllic place of eternal Pax Americana, the world turned into a complicated place of disorder with both immediate and latent crises.

Although the world economy is still dominated by North American and European countries, it is obvious that China and India are making Asia the second or even the first centre of the world. And this development should not be seen as the *rise* of Asia but rather as the *return* of Asia.

After all, in world history before the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the discovery of the Americas, Europe – even the Roman Empire – was on the periphery, while the main trade routes went along the Indian Ocean and the silk route from Asia led towards the West. At that time, wealth accumulated in India and China. Now the same is happening. The world is far from unipolar but increasingly multipolar, as shown by coalitions such as BRICS.

How wrong were the prophets of linear modernization and the end of history! Instead of linear history we are witnessing a cyclic history, as suggested by the old Indian and Chinese world view. Naturally the cycles do not bring back the same old history; it gets constantly renewed and poses new challenges. This is something that we all, and particularly the Western mainstream with its customary ethnocentric world view, are invited to take seriously in our soul-searching about where should we go from where we are now – 60 years after the founding of the IAMCR.