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Megatrends

The proposed chapter introduces some of the underlying and long-term developments – megatrends – (societal, economic, geopolitical and technological) that are key to the thorough understanding of the world we live in. Appreciating the importance of megatrends is also necessary for making predictions regarding the future. Analysing issues regarding security – understood in the broadest possible sense, in line with the approach chosen by EU Secure – should also be embedded in the general framework of megatrends studies. Therefore, this introductory chapter will guide learners through several topical issues in megatrend analysis, such as the ongoing geopolitical shift, demography and ageing, migratory pressures and their potential long-term consequences. Environmental sustainability, water security and climate change, coupled with overpopulation and overconsumption are serious challenges in the post-industrial world and long-term worries for scientists, policy-makers and the population alike. Artificial intelligence is, on the other hand, an emerging issue that (with mass robotisation) will have major security related consequences. This chapter has no capacity to detail all relevant megatrends, therefore it focuses on political and institutional issues that determine EU security and its existential dilemmas.

Keywords: megatrends, geopolitical shift, sustainability, demography, ecological transition, European Union, identity, artificial intelligence

Introducing the conceptual framework and its historical development

The term megatrends was coined by John Naisbitt in the early 1980s in his most referenced book (Naisbitt 1982). The term since then has been used by several authors and its scope has also been broadened. There is no uniform and globally accepted definition, but, simply put, megatrends are those often long-term developments that shape the world and have major impact on the future (OECD 2016; United Nations 2020). Social scientists, economists, futurologists have been examining megatrends mostly focusing on a selected area (demography, technology, ecological changes, etc.) (Prakash 2017). Some put this concept to the test and analyse the robustness of this term regarding its ability to describe or foretell global developments. Slaughter, for instance, pondered the value and usefulness of the concept and its reliability in deriving global changes from it (Slaughter 1993). Allahar studies the practical aspects of megatrend analysis, namely, how decision-makers could or should use it for policy purposes (Allahar 2014). While acknowledging the raison d'être of each definition, in this chapter we use the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) definition as a basis, which defines megatrends in the broadest sense focusing on their future impacts.

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Key factors

The ongoing academic discourse on the concept itself is in any case not the main concern of the proposed module. Rather, its intention is to provide a general overview of the most important megatrends and support learners to acquaint themselves with, and apply an approach to study global security affairs seeking to also understand the underlying major developments as root causes.

The international system is undergoing a rapid and historic transformation: key actors are reconsidering their role, their geostrategic possibilities and also the toolsets to achieve their geopolitical interests. New geopolitical realities are emerging, the actors and the international system are being reorganised around new nodes that are connected at various levels of their existence. Khanna in his *Connectography. Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* argues that, since the new Millennium, geo-economic systems have been organised into new types of geographic networks, and these operate on the basis of new kinds of methodological principles. According to Khanna, in this new formation, the direct and indirect interconnections of various infrastructures, even at great distances from each other, arise globally (Khanna 2016). As a result, new political realities emerge including major shifts in the political systems and in the list of key global actors, including regional and non-governmental actors as well as the states. The role of macro-regions and interregional ties are being redefined (Voskressenski–Koller 2019). The focus of the global political agenda is also changing rapidly. Issues such as technology (AI) and its societal consequences, or sustainability in a broad sense (encompassing environmental, climatic and also fiscal and demographic aspects), the disruptive societal role of giant technological companies, and the general societal frustration with democracy in the West, among other things, have come to the forefront. A new generation of Westerners has appeared: the crisis generation, including the political elite that must navigate from one crisis to another with contestable rate of success (Tsatsanis et al. 2021). New and important players have appeared and some of the traditional forces face rapid decline. These disruptive changes are often instigated by underlying changes in the global context whose effects extend beyond the Western political (democratic) cycles; therefore, decision-makers would need to apply many longer-term political agendas that are most of the time challenging or impossible. Therefore, the gap between 'should' and 'done' is widening.

Global trends (especially the so-called megatrends, whose transformative power has started to be felt recently by both political forces and societies through the stubborn emergence of different types of crises) by definition defy political reactions, political agendas of short and medium term, therefore are very difficult to manage by will. Thus, understanding global trends and their game-changing impact on geopolitics, economy and societal developments is the key to ponder the different possible paths international politics and the global order may follow (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni–Hofmann 2019; Toffler 1990).

The European Union (EU), and Europe more generally is particularly exposed to the potential adverse effects of unfolding megatrends which have stark security consequences for European states and also for the integration itself. The EU as a unique,

sui generis form of regional integration, is becoming a differentiated political system (Koller 2012). The unsustainability of several aspects of the economic, political and social constructs on the continent is ever more visible. Unsustainability as presented by Marján serves as the starting point of the analysis that has to consider ecological, demographic, budgetary aspects and also politico-institutional considerations that all have considerable security repercussions (Marján 2010).

The radical increase (doubling in hardly more than a generation) of the dependency ratio (ratio of retirees over the active population) in every EU member state is one of the most powerful and highly underrated trends that impacts not only the labour market, but the general budgetary stability and in the medium-term the sustainability of the European social model but also the political system of the European Union.

The inherent instability of the European demographic situation (persistently low fertility rate – way under the minimal 2.1), the unprecedented demographic ageing of the society, coupled with ever more evident policy failures related to labour force import by immigration is also a game changing phenomenon in the long run. Unless tackled efficiently, the negative demographic trends in the European Union will result in further erosion of societal peace and security (Marján 2011).

Looming ecological and climatic trends (including their repercussions such as the increase of the migratory pressure from Africa) is another historical challenge that will have to be tackled against the backdrop of shrinking European budgetary and geopolitical clout.

Migration from insecure and poor regions of the neighbourhood is a long-term reality for Europe. The stark difference of the age pyramid and the level of security and wealth between Europe and most of its immediate neighbouring areas will guarantee that the migratory pressure on Europe will be sustained for several generations. Migration and its potential mismanagement remain a direct and indirect security challenge for the EU and most of its member states.

In the course, our aim is to approach megatrends also from the perspective of the 'self', the individual in the complex, multi-layered international system. Basing our argument on Fukuyama's thesis that the need for the recognition of the individual's identity is the key to understanding the political, economic and social processes in the world (Fukuyama 2018).

As already stated, there is no uniform and globally accepted definition for the term megatrends, but, simply put, megatrends are those, often long-term, developments that shape the world and have major impact on the future (OECD 2016). The elements of the megatrend concept have been continuously evolving and, as societal and technological changes emerge, the issue list under analysis has become widened. From a methodological point of view, trend analysis plays a central role in understanding the concept. This, to some extent, also allows scenario mapping to forecast possible future developments. Trend analysis is the process of comparing data over time to identify any consistent results or trends and to extract underlying patterns and the dynamics of social, technical, economic, environmental and political ("STEEP") trends. Scenario mapping also provides the possibility of trying out possible outcomes by simulation games.

This chapter does not aim at, nor has the capacity to present all megatrends that are relevant for the European security beyond giving a short introduction to them. It will rather focus on the political and institutional impacts on the EU. Otherwise the following issues merit analysis in the framework of European security and sustainability: the major geopolitical developments: from Post Pax Americana (Kupchan 1999) towards the age of black swan events (Taleb 2009) – meaning unpredictable, not normally expected series of occurrences; global and regional demographic trends and their geopolitical consequences; ageing and demographic unsustainability; global overpopulation and the risk of pandemics; global migration trends and the probably sustained, long-term migration pressure on Europe; environmental sustainability, water security; climate change and climatic migration; the economic and societal consequences of the emergence of artificial intelligence and robotisation (Asaro 2007); the changing perception of politics and policy making, the functioning of democracy and shifting identities in the West; megatrend-driven political, economic and institutional challenges for the EU.

From the geopolitical side, the most important megatrend is the major and somewhat surprisingly quick realignment of global balance by the rapid rise of China as a hegemonic contender and the decline of the USA as an uncontested global leader. This latter perception was spectacularly amplified by the chaotic Western withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021. The world has entered a very unpredictable post Pax Americana order, in which the previous global hegemon has no power, nor the will to guarantee global stability and its uncontested global leadership. This forces the EU to seek ways to build its strategic autonomy both in soft and hard power factors. This recognition by European leaders and strategists is quite recent, a lot remains to be done in practice. Moreover, it seems that major geopolitical decisions must be taken regarding the EU's positioning vis-à-vis the emerging new world power but also its potential and – for the EU – more aggressive partner, Russia. A rapidly changing world order also increases the level of global and regional unpredictability (see 'black swan events'), which forces the EU to either further lose its global political clout and face a higher level of internal security or to put in place institutions and capacities that can adequately face these new challenges, in the form of a more powerful common foreign policy, better internal security coordination and/or more joint military capacities. In some ways, the outbreak of an epidemic, such as Covid in 2019 or Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, were also unexpected and unpredictable.

Apart from the rapid shift in the geopolitical order whereby Western hegemony is contested, there are deeper underlying developments that are shaping the future of our planet, including that of the EU.

A dedicated chapter will discuss climate change (tenth chapter, 167–182), which is clearly a game-changer both for international relations and global sustainability but also for European societal, economic and political developments. Hereby we underline one related element which is climate related migration to Europe from those regions where the degradation of the climate situation and water supply will force masses to migrate to places where these conditions are much better, namely Europe. The possible rise in climate related migration in the coming decades will further increase the sustained

migratory pressure on European shores and borders that are already overwhelmed even if more and more EU border nations decide to erect fences to check illegal migrants from Africa and the Middle East. The Earth could experience a greater temperature increase in the next 50 years than it did in the last 6,000 years combined. By 2070, the so-called extremely hot zones could represent a fifth of the global surface (presently it is 1%), potentially putting one third of the global population under climatic conditions that are climatically inappropriate for human existence. The implementation of the European Green Deal also raises questions (Szulecki 2020).

The 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration by the UN International Organisation for Migration was the first-ever negotiated global framework on migration that recognises that migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation is a reality, and makes commitments to support both migrants and States (IOM 2018).

The global population has been exploding in the last hundred years but according to projections it will stabilise later in the 21st century. Between 1950 and 2018, average annual population growth was 1.6%. Recently it is 1% and will decline gradually. The population of the earth is projected to stabilise at around 11 billion. Even if the global population stabilises around that figure, unsustainability both economically and environmentally seems a real issue.

At the same time, the global population is ageing on average: the share of the population over age 65 will rise from 5% in 1950 to 15% in 2050 and further up to 25% by 2100. 2018 was a global demographic turning point: the planet had more people aged 65 years and over than children under five for the first time in history. Having said that there is considerable diversity across regions: Europe, Japan and the United States are ageing most rapidly, thereby losing their labour-force base at a quick pace.

Countries with shrinking labour forces contribute to 90% of today's global economic growth. The main centres of continued population growth are in the Indian subcontinent and Sub-Saharan Africa, and this latter will account for over a quarter of total population growth for the rest of the 21st century. The portion of the world living in high income countries will fall from 32% in 1950 to 10% by 2050 (Open Mind BBVA 2019). These trends point to a sustained and long-term migration pressure on European countries.

Europe is particularly vulnerable regarding demographics, unless a radically different policy approach to the old-age pension systems is established. Otherwise, the European pension systems and in a broader sense, the European social model will most probably prove to be unsustainable. The recent experience of complex difficulties with the integration of third country nationals into the European labour market and the new waves of immigration impose additional burdens on states and the European Union. The general trend of overpopulation, and radically different age composition of EU and African countries, coupled with climate unsustainability and the possible emergence of regional conflicts around its border puts a massive and complex security pressure on Europe both at EU and nation state level.

The rising probability of climatic and environmental unsustainability coupled with ever-growing global mobility indirectly increases the emergence of pandemics that will

put pressure on European economies and health systems but also on political institutions as we saw it from the recent Covid-19 experience.

From the technological side, the most important megatrend is the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (European Economic and Social Committee 2018; European Commission 2020a). AI systems are disrupting markets, legal rules and principles that could be used so far (Bostrom 2014). AI will have major impacts on the global labour market, as well. According to psychologist Robert Sternberg (Gregory 2004: 472) there are as many definitions of artificial intelligence as there are experts who have been asked to define it. It is important that the concept of AI is precisely defined so that it can adapt flexibly to technological progress while at the same time ensuring legal certainty. The Council of Europe defines AI as a set of sciences, theories and techniques whose purpose is to reproduce by a machine the cognitive abilities of a human being. The development of common sense, reasoning and problem-solving skills in machines is a very difficult task, which is why AI combines research in a wide variety of fields (Gregory 2004). John R. Searle (1980) introduced the definitions weak AI (Artificial Narrow Intelligence, Weak AI) and strong AI (Strong Artificial Intelligence). In case of weak AI, intelligence is only a "semblance", but we do not know whether it has a mind or not. A strong AI is a system that really thinks, has an independent consciousness. By 2050, we should expect human-like AI robots to "live" with people in many areas. It will be in the interest of mankind to live in harmony and work with it.

The effects of the rapid development of AI in the field of regulation by international law are also given great attention, and the paradigm shift has begun in the field of legal culture. In the legal regulation of artificial intelligence technologies, in addition to a wide range of rules on legal responsibility, a number of open issues remain: the benefits and risks of its use, what ethical issues arise in the case of a malfunctioning AI, who is responsible, whether the protection of privacy can be ensured, whether the full spectrum of risks and damages can be covered by legal mechanisms, whether AI can be considered a legal entity from a moral and practical point of view, etc. The recognition and wording of application problems puts lawyers under "coercion of legal development" (Keserű 2020). More than twenty-five states announced their AI strategy or published plans for future strategies, including the United States, Russia, China and India. Many plans focus on maintaining a competitive advantage in the emerging AI market, although many also take into account the ethical and security aspects of promoting AI (Nash 2019).

As regards political and institutional aspects, megatrends shall be approached also from the individual point of view in the complex, multi-layered international system. As Fukuyama argues in his recent book on identity, "the inner self of dignity seeks recognition" (Fukuyama 2018). All human beings continuously fight for recognition by others, i.e. for the recognition by the surrounding communities. "Individuals demand public recognition of their world", which results in the growing importance of identity politics. "Identity politics encompasses a large part of the political struggles of contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics of contemporary American university campuses" (Fukuyama 2018; 10). If we intend to understand how individuals act in their collective communities

such as the local vicinity, the regions, the cities, the nation and the supranational entities (e.g. the European Union) and also in global context, we have to enquire into the nature of their collective attachments and their motivation behind the political, economic and social mega processes. All of the collective communities and their opinion-leaders (politicians of various levels of governance, NGO activists, lobbyists, media representatives, etc.) act as the "identity constructors" (Hobsbawm–Ranger 1983) of imagined communities (Anderson 1991) and work on holding the communities together through the identification of individuals, so it is a priority for them to invent new elements of identity and strengthen them in order to clearly mark the boundary of the particular community. Since the individuals are members of various collective communities at the same time, they are affected by identity politics from several directions (both in space and time as well as in virtual and cyber communities). Identity and identity politics, therefore, are unquestionably among the most important concepts (Greenfield 2009) for understanding megatrends in the world and also in Europe.

In an increasingly politicised European Union, where the European citizens are becoming political actors, it is essential what they think about their Europeanness, whether they share common European values and what their ideas and proposals are on certain policy issues, institutional and political questions. A political system is legitimate if it is based on legality and democracy and is accepted by its citizens. The EU's legitimacy is also dependent upon its citizens who not only rationally understand and accept the procedures and the institutions of the polity they live in, but also emotionally relate to it. They like or dislike it. They do or do not identify with it. Do European citizens understand the European Union? Do they support the project? Do they like it? Do they identify with it? Euroscepticism is strengthening all over Europe. Understanding its nature is also crucial both for having a picture on the possible scenarios of the future of Europe and for better understanding Member State politics.

The constructed European identity has fifty years of history (Koller 2006; 2011). European elites initiated the gradual establishment of European identity in the 1970s and since then the European Community/European Union has made great efforts to establish the legal and political framework, a common cultural policy as well as the symbols for the sake of a common identity. Beyond the structural elements, as, for example, the citizenship of the Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights that became binding when the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, the European Union strived to create the symbolic elements of the common identity. The blue flag with the golden stars 'representing the union of the peoples of Europe'; the anthem, Beethoven's 9th Symphony; 'Europe Day' on 9 May; and the common currency, the Euro all symbolise a sense of belonging to the EU. The European identity has many constructed elements, both structural and symbolic. The establishment of the European identity, however, should be looked at as not only a construct but also an outcome of a socialisation process. "It is wrong to conceptualize European identity in zero-sum terms, as if an increase in European identity necessarily decreases one's loyalty to national or other communities" (Risse 2005; 291–309). Collective identities of Europeans can only be imagined in a more differentiated structure. For individuals, the immediate vicinity, the town or village where

they live, the region, the county, the nation, the European Union all signify one of their geographical attachments. Nevertheless, for a long time the prevalent opinion was held that there is a certain hierarchy between these collective allegiances and national identity has a peculiar and superior place among these attachments. "National identification possesses distinct advantages over the idea of a unified European identity" (Smith 1997: 322). Although the majority of theorists accept the concept of multiple identities, they differ in understanding its content. The concentric circles of identities, the "matryoshka of identities" (Salazar 1998), the "many-storey house" (Konrád 1997) metaphors all try to show the multiple layers of the collective attachments. European identity can be best interpreted as an identity net (Koller 2006). The identity net signifies the dynamic co-existence of individuals' collective attachments and also includes the time dimension. According to functionalist logic, the individuals regularly decide which aspect or junction of their identity net they activate in their everyday lives. Individuals are capable of changing their collective attachments regularly as well as their respective ranking and intensity.

Establishing and strengthening European identity is one among the key factors of the future existence of the European Union. More than nine in ten Europeans (92%) agree that EU citizens' voice should be taken more into account for decisions relating to the future of Europe (+5 since the summer of 2020), which is a clear sign that European citizens care about the current challenges in Europe and they are ready to respond to them (European Parliament 2020).

One of the most important issues of our time is the faith in democracy and sustainability of the democratic systems. And in this respect we have to be familiar with global megatrends. After acknowledging the difficulties of classifying regimes as well as defining and measuring democracies, Larry Diamond analyses the trends of democracies since the 1970s, and argues that "the world has been in a mild but protracted democratic recession since about 2006" (Diamond 2015: 145–155).

Examining democracy in the European Union is one of the key topics of our time. How democratic is the European Union? How democratic are the Member States? Are there any new trends in this respect? As Arató and Koller argue: "The European Union would not be admitted to the European Union on the basis of its current political system. This thesis sentence refers to two factors. On the one hand, it indicates that the European Union's political system leaves much to be desired in terms of democratic characteristics, and on the other hand, it points out that the EU imposes conditions on candidate countries that would like to join the EU as a requirement for democratic principles compliance" (Arató–Koller 2019: 197).

It is important to note, however, that in European integration, the issue of democracy has only gradually become the focus of interest. In the blooming years of integration, mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, the European Community, and its regulatory activities, which mainly encompassed economic activities, did not raise any serious issues of democracy or legitimacy. At the time of the technocratic take-off of European integration, in the period of "permissive consensus", the European public was not particularly interested in the European Community. This, however, changed in the 1990s with the Maastricht Treaty entering

into force and establishing the European Union. Since the nineties, the political system of the EU has transformed into multilevel governance (Marks et al. 1996) and turned away from its previously dominantly technocratic character and has become a politicised community where the European citizens and political parties are more actively involved in policy-making decisions. This also resulted in the changing character of the political system (for more see Hix–Høyland 2011; Nugent 2010). Signs of "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe–Marks 2009) became everyday experience at EU-level and Member States' politics and political-type debates occur more often. Two effects of this can be highlighted. First, politicisation means that more EU policy issues have been raised at both EU and member state levels. Second, policy debates that were formerly conducted in technocratic circles started to generate wide-ranging political discourses involving European citizens and political parties. Some authors argue for the emergence of a European demos (Weiler 1997) while others emphasise the non-existence or at least weak existence of a European demos (see, for example, Schöpflin 2019). Nevertheless, interpretation of politicisation could have both positive and negative aspects. Politicisation, on the one hand, can be interpreted as a positive process, contributing to bringing the EU political system closer to citizens. But it also results in policy decisions becoming more difficult and in the failing of some policy initiatives due to the intra- or inter-Member State political battles.

At this point, the concept of democratic deficit has to be mentioned (Arató–Koller 2019: 197–209). According to Weiler, the Member States' executive power are "overweight" in the European Union's decision-making processes referring to the Council with the representatives of the Member States and also the Commission whose members are non-elected individuals although they are meant to represent the European interest. Further, the European Parliament as co-legislative institution is extremely weak compared to the full legislative powers of national parliaments. The EP elections are not 'European', the candidates are not campaigning with European programs and there is not a European party system. Moreover, the EU's political system is too far away from the European citizens (Weiler et al. 1995; Hix–Hoyland 2011: 132–137; Arató–Koller 2019: 199).

Turning to the other side of the coin, the functioning of Member States' democracies also raises concerns. The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, which currently refer to the principles of the European Union, are set out in Articles 2, 4 and 7. Article 2 transforms the principles listed in the Amsterdam Treaty into values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human and minority rights, as well as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men, complemented by the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The provisions of Article 2 are nuanced by Article 4 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), which states that the European Union shall respect the identities and the political and constitutional structures of the Member States (Arató–Koller 2019: 197). Recently, the Article 7 procedure and the so-called 'nuclear option' is in the centre of both political and academic discourse. According to Article 7, "the Council, acting by a qualified majority, may decide to suspend certain of the rights deriving from the application of the Treaties to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that

Member State in the Council" (Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union). The latter has never been applied yet, but Article 7 procedure was initiated first against Poland in 2017, then against Hungary in 2018. Since then the European Union developed a rule of law review mechanism and published the first Rule of Law Country Reports in 2020 (European Commission 2020b). While the reports list reforms and acknowledgments in several Member States, concerns and issues to be solved are also highlighted in the reviews. Despite the comparative approach, the methodology, the data collection, the aspects of analysis and conceptualisation – even including a consensual definition of the rule of law – all remain subject of both heated political and academic debates.

All this shows that in Europe, concepts such as the rule of law and democracy that were formerly considered non-questionable terms are recently being questioned and relativised by Member States according to their own interests and values. In a 'sui generis', hybrid political community such as the European Union, where the EU and the Member States have shared competencies in several policy areas, this has resulted in political debates, tensions, divisions and also deadlocks in negotiations which threaten the future existence of the community.

Conclusions

In the last fifteen years, the European Union faced numerous crises both internally and externally: an economic and financial crisis, an institutional crisis, a political crisis, a refugee crisis and currently the Covid-19 crisis. The outer environment of the EU has also changed significantly. Megatrends are shaping the international systems in various aspects. The international system is undergoing a rapid and historic transformation; key actors are reconsidering their role, their geostrategic possibilities and the toolsets to achieve their geopolitical interests. New geopolitical realities are emerging; the actors and the international system are being reorganised around new nodes that are connected at various level of their existence. Since the new Millennium, geo-economic systems have been organised into new types of geographic networks, and these operate on the basis of new kinds of methodological principles. The direct and indirect interconnection of various infrastructures, even at great distances from each other, arise (Khanna 2016). As a result, new political realities emerge including major shifts in the political systems and in the list of key global actors, including regional and non-governmental actors as well as the state (Voskressenski–Koller 2019). The role of regions and interregional ties is being redefined. The European Union and its role in the reshaped international system and in a rapidly changing world needs to be redesigned. Europe needs to reinvent itself in order to be able to provide effective responses to these trends. The Strategic Foresight Reports launched first in 2020 and since then every year aim to "explore, anticipate and shape the future" and be able to provide a platform for reaching policy goals that can only be done by applying a wider perspective and being aware of the megatrends (European Commission 2020c; 2021; 2022).

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