Globalisation and global challenges

A. Globalisation

Globalisation (or globalization) refers to the worldwide change on an economic, technological and cultural level. It also refers to the growing interaction between cultures and economies in what is often called a *global village*. This change is becoming visible in the increasing global mobility of people (including tourists, immigrants, refugees and business travellers), and in the global flows of money and goods between international markets and production sites. Globalisation also shows itself in the global spread (and clash) of ideas and values, and in the global distribution of information that appears on computer screens, in newspapers, on television and on the radio.

The process of globalisation after World World II has been made possible by technological progress, especially in communications and in production methods. This process has taken place against the background of a period of undisrupted peace and stability in the Western world. It has also been supported by the growing influence of international organisations.

Basic global trends

1. Economic globalisation: Signs of economic globalisation are, for example, the existence of *global players*, i.e. multinational companies that produce wherever labour and overhead costs are cheapest, and then sell throughout the global market, thus maximising their profits and expanding trade. The increase in mergers between international companies, which create huge corporations operating worldwide, has led to a rise in international trade and foreign direct investment, promoted, among others, by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Capital flows around the world much more easily, a trend which is also encouraged by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which give loans (often interest-free) to finance infrastructure projects and other development programmes.

2. Technological globalisation: Over the last 30 years we have observed rapid technological change. The microelectronics revolution has changed human contact on earth for ever. Distances are shrinking, and information is spreading faster than ever before. The Internet, the World Wide Web and communications satellites have helped this process, making it possible for everybody to communicate more easily and efficiently across national boundaries.

3. Cultural globalisation: The new channels of communication have also helped to spread a largely commercial culture. *Hollywood* and *Bollywood* movies and American-style youth culture attract millions of people worldwide. Another sign of cultural globalisation is the spread of fast-food chains and ethnic restaurants all over the world.

Effects on the industrialised countries

Growing competition: With the constant pressure to cut costs in a free market economy, by simplifying hiring and firing or privatising state-owned companies, there is a clear priority for efficiency, speed and profits.

Changes in working conditions and job opportunities: These often lead to things like longer working hours and fewer holidays, lower wages with poorer working conditions, rising unemployment and early retirement, a demand for greater flexibility, higher mobility and better qualifications, or more part-time and temporary work instead of jobs for life.

Advantages and hopes

In the developing countries the population hopes for new jobs, for example in the local branches of multinational companies, and businessmen expect new opportunities and markets. The market economy is generally seen as a successful economic system which will hopefully result in rising living standards and less poverty.

In the industrial world the hope is that through international trade and new business opportunities, they will be able to preserve national social standards and income levels. In addition, the spread of freedom, democracy and human rights makes people hope for fewer wars and other conflicts worldwide.

For humankind as a whole the increasing opportunities for exchange on a personal level may ideally lead to a greater understanding and friendship among "world citizens". Ideally, this could lead to a peaceful, borderless world of shared universal values and general economic prosperity.

Criticism and fears

In the developing countries a lot of people fear an increasing dependence on foreign support, investment and credits, or they warn against the danger of foreign investors suddenly pulling out their capital. Some see political danger in the strenghtening of corrupt governments, others point out negative cultural influences or even manipulation through the mass media.

In the industrial world experts predict both the erosion of national cultures in Europe and massive illegal immigration. In economic terms, the increasing power of multinational companies is problematic because they can no longer be controlled by elected governments.

For humankind as a whole there is the fear that the majority of people will not profit from globalisation. Largely uncontrolled economic activities are expected to produce increasing inequality as well as a growth in regional and ethnic tensions, or in pollution. According to the critics, the

"survival of the fittest" could become the slogan of an in-human, competitive global world. They warn against re-duced cultural diversity and the destruction of local cul-tures. This so-called Westernisation/Americanisation of the world is predicted to widen the gap between rich and poor. It might also encourage suspicion, resentment and xeno-phobia in less powerful nations which feel overrun by strong global economies.

B. Global challenges

Poverty

Today one of the greatest challenges for mankind is bridg-ing the gap between the rich and the poor. Poor people often do not have access to employment, basic health care, education and essential commodities such as food, clothing, shelter and water. Possible ways to narrow this gap are debt relief, economic development and fair trading conditions for developing countries.

Ecological issues

Pollution: The industrialised nations cause most of the environmental problems which the world faces. These include air pollution (through industrial emissions and exhaust gases), water pollution (through chemical waste produced by factories and private households), soil pollu-tion (through the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers in intensive farming), and the production of waste that is neither recyclable nor biodegradable.

Global warming: Greenhouse gases prevent a natural process which keeps the Earth's average surface tempera-ture at about 15 degrees centigrade. These gases allow solar radiation to pass through the Earth's atmosphere. At the same time they stop most of the Earth's infrared radiation from escaping into outer space. This 'greenhouse effect' is intensified by increasing global economic activity. More heat-trapping gases (i.e. emissions produced by industry, the burning of fossil fuels, transport and deforestation) are released into the atmosphere and these increase global warming. One possible consequence of global warming is that polar ice will melt, causing sea levels to rise, and flooding coastal areas. Another is that the climate will change. New deserts will be formed and "freak" weather conditions like hurricanes, heatwaves and droughts will occur more frequently.

Towards 'sustainable development' – international conferences

In 1992, a UN conference called the **Earth Summit '92**, considered the urgent need for development in Third World countries. In Agenda 21 it laid down the principles of sus-tainable development (i.e. development that meets the needs of the present without destroying the ability of future generations to meet their own needs): "Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indi-visible." The sustainable development of a country means building markets and creating jobs, including everybody in this process and giving everybody a choice in deciding about their own future.

In September 2000, 147 world leaders met at the **Millennium Summit** to discuss ways of reducing poverty and improving people's lives. They drew up a list of goals to be met by 2015. They promised to fight extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve basic schooling for all children, to promote gender equality and support women, to reduce child mortality, to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and other dis-eases, to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop a global partnership.

Global political players

America's global role in the 21st century: With the col-lapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the US became the only political superpower in the world. As a result, it took on the role of 'global policeman', starting with the Gulf War (1991). Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon on 11th September 2001, President Bush declared war on terrorism.

The unstable Middle East region with its explosive mix of poverty, oil interests, nuclear capacity, radical followers of Islam and international terrorism is America's area of chief concern at the beginning of the 21st century. The US have tried to control these various dangers and to build up democratic and free societies in unstable areas by using diplomacy, treaties, trade contracts, economic pressure and military interventions. By intervening militarily in Afghani-stan and Iraq, the US has also demonstrated that they are prepared to use their military power in their own self-interest.

The United Nations was founded after the end of World War II by the victorious world powers who hoped that it would act to prevent conflicts between nations and to make future wars impossible. The UN aims to promote peace, justice, human rights and economic development. It pro-vides a framework for cooperation in international security through peace-keeping forces and humanitarian assistance.

Non-government organisations:
Greenpeace is known for its use of nonviolent, direct action campaigns to stop things like nuclear testing, high seas whaling, global warming and genetic engineering.
Amnesty International is an international, non-governmental organisation which aims to promote human rights, i.e. to free all prisoners of conscience, to ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners, to abolish the death penalty, torture and other ways of treating prisoners which it regards as cruel, and to end political killings and forced disappearances.