

DEMOGRAPHY TRIUMPHS OVER GEOGRAPHY

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Rezumat. *Articolul de față pornește de la premisa că fenomenele demografice influențează semnificativ procesele contemporane de dezvoltare și de creștere economică. Înainte de a fi dezvoltată sau mai puțin dezvoltată, lumea este locuită de populații, iar evoluția și mișcarea acestor populații influențează mai mult decât orice altceva tabloul lumii de mâine. Am ales pentru a discuta mai aplicat această problemă trei zone ale lumii: Europa (cu deosebire problema prezenței musulmane pe continent), Statele Unite (fluxul demografic dintre Mexic și SUA) și Siberia și Orientul Îndepărtat rusec (dezechilibrele demografice create pe fluviul Amur între populația rusească și cea chineză). Aceste zone atestă cât sunt de complicate procesele demografice și cât de consistente sunt tendințele pe termen lung pe care le inaugurează. Că inegalitățile demografice pot fi întâlnite în arii geografice și în contexte diferite, că ele cuprind, practic, toate regiunile lumii. În acest sens putem vorbi de o problemă globală. Evoluțiile demografice inegale reprezintă o provocare la adresa identităților de orice fel. Ele schimbă tabloul lumii contemporane, iar această prefacere este însoțită tensiuni și instabilități care pot pune sub semnul întrebării întregul set de valori și criterii cu care ne-am obișnuit.*

Abstract. *This article is premised on the idea that population-related phenomena underlie processes of development and economic growth, albeit not in a straightforward or simple manner. It seeks to underline not merely the more basic relationship between economic processes and the human factor underlying them but the major influence that contemporary demographic trends will have on the global distribution of power. In order to discuss these issues in more practical terms, we have chosen three regions whose demographic profile is dramatic: Europe (more specifically the question of Muslim presence on the European continent), US (the situation at the Mexican border) and Siberia and the Russian Far East (the demographic imbalances created by the banks of the Amur river between the Russian shrinking population and the Chinese booming one). These three regions illustrate the complexity of both contemporary and future demographic phenomena. They show that demographic asymmetries exist in different social and geographical settings and are practically spread all around the world. They add to the argument that demography is a truly global issue. The analysis highlights a deep layer of contemporary world that has the capacity to change existing patterns irreversibly – the layer of demography, together with all the processes entailed by it: unequal demographic evolution of groups and communities, spatial movements and migration, changing patterns of population distribution within a country, group of countries or a world region, different demographic densities of various territories. These are quiet, long-term, and less visible processes, which partly accounts for them not being discussed too heavily. Unequal demographic rates pose a major challenge to identities of any kind: group, regional or national identities. Technology creates disparities, but demographic imbalances breed long-lasting instability. The current demographic processes shift the tectonic plates that history has slowly accumulated in the shape of habits, values, cultures. These tectonic shifts will likely awaken identities and claims to identity, creating the proper ground for tensions, clashes, even open conflicts.*

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1. Demography – a global issue

Today's discussion around global issues is loaded with economic topics: indicators, percentages, ranks etc. Behind this economic reality, there lies a totally different one, the demographic reality. Population is a major engine of economic growth having a direct influence on the pace, quality and timeliness of development. When population growth is matched by a sound development strategy, then economic take-off happens: the rise of China and India offers a clear case in point. It is the purpose of this article to underline not merely the more basic relationship between economic processes and the human factor underlying them but the major influence that contemporary demographic trends will have on the global distribution of power. Above all indicators of development or underdevelopment, it is the people who inhabit the world. The size, structure and distribution of populations, the spatial and temporal changes in them influence significantly the way the world will look like tomorrow.

The population problem is worth discussing in the context of the so called "geopolitical density" of a territory. This is an indicator of the degree to which that territory is occupied demographically, economically and culturally. This geopolitical density is the result of a multilayered process, one of the major layers being population itself. Population is a sensitive indicator of what exists today and especially of what is about to come. When big economic disparities appear between two neighboring territories, the one with a less vibrant economic life automatically loses some of its geopolitical density. A striking phenomenon has occurred for the last few decades – the emergence of economically developed but sparsely populated regions – thus creating disparities that deeply erode the geopolitical density of such regions. These disparities have widened up to the point where they start to erode the economic performance as such. Europe and Japan are mostly affected by this trend and they rely heavily on labor import in order to maintain their levels of economic growth.

Today's demographic processes are fundamentally different from those of previous epochs. Demographic growth no longer happens in the developed world, as it was the case at the dawn of the modern period. Instead, almost all growth of the present moment takes place in less developed regions. In the past, it was the people from relatively rich countries who chose to migrate to unexplored spaces; these people were driven by the new opportunities that such empty spaces might open. Today, immigration flows take place from the less developed to the developed world, the prosperity of the latter being a genuine magnet for massive crowds of people.

Globally, the rate of population growth has been steadily declining, yet the number of humans will continue to rise. Growth remains high in the so called “instability arc”, meaning the area covering Central and (parts of) South America, South and Central Asia, Middle East and Africa. It is very likely that sooner or later the huge influx of people from this area will overflow; where and how these people will be distributed is of utmost importance for world affairs.

Let us have a look at the situation in South Asia, at Pakistan and Bangladesh more specifically. These are two of the world’s poorest and most densely populated countries. In 1970, Pakistan had 65 million people. Since then, its population has reached 173 million, meaning it tripled in about 39 years. Its population is projected to reach 251 million in 2020, making it the world’s 5th most populated country. In 1970, Bangladesh had 65 million people, well below Japan’s population. Today, it has 154 million people, outstripping Japan with 30 million. Its population is projected to reach 210 million in 2020 (meaning twice that of Japan). Between India and Bangladesh, there lies India, whose population is 1,148 million (double than in 1970), estimates being that it will reach 1,320 million in 2020. In other terms, ten years from now, about 1.8 billion people – meaning a quarter of the entire world population – will inhabit that relatively small area. Can anyone imagine that this huge amount of people will not overflow to less populated regions?

Demographic divides are as big as economic ones. But while economic intervention is likely to bring about results, demography-related interventions are more difficult and the results harder to predict. The difficulty of such interventions lies mainly in the fact that a demographic pattern is bred by a cultural pattern. Given the relative impermeability of cultural patterns, the reversal of demographic trends is very complex, even unlikely.

Today, Asian population accounts for 60.9% of world population and the percentage is projected to reach 65 within the next 10-15 years. Europe’s population accounts for 8.7% of world’s population. According to UN estimates, in 2050, Europe’s population will decline to 557 or 653 million, depending on the different assumptions regarding the fertility rate. According to George Friedman, the lowest figure, that of 557 million assumes a 1.6 fertility rate (2009, 52). Let us assume that Europe will have 5.5 million inhabitants in 2050, meaning that it will account for 5% of world population. Will it still be able to have a say in world affairs given this low ratio, no matter how educated and skilled this population might be? Soon, only 1 person out of 20 will be European, while 12 will be Asian. Demographic asymmetries fuel economic asymmetries, influencing the future potential for development. Population-related phenomena underlie processes of development and economic growth, albeit not in a straightforward or simple manner.

The relevance of demographic figures is manifold. As we have already underlined, economic performance is influenced by demographic trends and processes. Besides, demographic imbalances trigger migration phenomena, which are as long lasting as the demographic figures themselves. Pressure is exerted from less developed, but heavily populated regions towards prosperous, but sparsely populated regions. First, the borders will become more fluid as a result of these vigorous migration flows. Due to asymmetries in fertility rates, the immigrant population will be more and more numerous on the old territory; demographic imbalances may grow up to the point where the immigrant population occupies the old territory and make claims to it.

In order to discuss these issues in more practical terms, we have chosen three regions with distinct demographic profiles. They illustrate the complexity of both contemporary and future demographic phenomena.

What these three cases show is that demographic asymmetries exist in different social and geographical settings and are practically spread all around the world. They add to the argument that demography is a truly global issue.

2. “The world of Islam may do more to define and shape Europe in the twenty-first century than the United States, Russia or even the European Union”

Demography problems are most dramatic on the European continent. Let us begin by quoting the introductory statement of the chapter “Islam in Europe” from Timothy Garton Ash’s book “Facts are subversive”:

“On a bright summer’s day in 2006, I visited the famous basilica of Saint Denis, on the outskirts of Paris. I admired the magnificent tombs and funerary monuments of the kings and queens of France, including that of Charles Martel (“the Hammer”), whose victory over the invading Muslim armies near Poitiers in AD 733 is traditionally held to have halted the Islamization of Europe. Stepping out of the basilica, I walked a hundred yards across the Place Victor Hugo to the main commercial street, which was thronged with local shoppers of Arab and African origin, including many women wearing the hijab, I caught myself thinking: so the Muslims have won the Battle of Poitiers after all! Won it not by force of arms, but by peaceful immigration and fertility” (Ash, 2009, 171).

Discussion around European issues mainly focuses on “grand” traditional topics: transatlantic relationships, the relationships with Russia, China and the entire Asia. In other terms, focus is on the relationship between the old continent and the big actors of contemporary life. This, of course, is highly relevant. At the same time, little attention is given to future trends among which the demographic ones appear to be the most prominent and most likely to have a long lasting effect.

The world of Islam has influenced Europe in many substantial ways. The first instance of Muslim influence was exerted after the quick conquest of Southern Spain at the beginning of the 8th century. After that important Spanish territory was occupied, Muslim armies campaigned their way to the heart of Europe. The Battle of Poitiers is historically important because it is the hallmark of this confrontation and it represents the turning point after which the retreat of the Muslim armies began. The victory of the French king was reinforced by the many successive battles and victories won by Spanish kings, by that special concentration of efforts to overthrow the Muslim rule known by the name of *Reconquista*.

Later, Europe had to accommodate the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The victory of Poitiers was never reenacted. In 1453, Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, falls under Ottoman rule. Two centuries later, Vienna is besieged by the armies of an ever-expanding empire. The siege is not successful due to the intervention of the Polish king Sobieski. The battle of Lepanto in 1571 is far from being a resolute victory against the Ottoman Empire, yet it is highly significant for this centuries-long confrontation. First, its significance lies in the fact that it was not incurred by armies as such, but by the technology used: a decisive advantage for the Christian fleet was its numerical and technical superiority in guns and cannons aboard the ships. Second, this victory put an end to Ottoman naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. The demographic consequences of the Islamic occupation of the South Eastern part of Europe are particularly relevant even today, the conversion of Albanian population to Islam and the emergence of numerous Islamic populations in Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia being two of them.

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the implementation of reforms meant to transform it into a modern secular state, as well as after the end of colonial rule in North Africa, it looked as if “Islam in Europe” was a closed subject. Contemporary developments show just the opposite and the world is witnessing how Islam is shaping Europe in a totally different manner. Previous confrontations between Islam and Europe were military in nature; they had to do with territorial claims and the pursuit of supremacy. Today, the process is demographic in nature, which asks for a totally different approach. The process is quiet and less spectacular; yet, it is long long lasting and largely irreversible, especially given the fact that it is underpinned by a cultural pattern.

Considering all these, Timothy M. Savage’s opening remarks of his article “Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing” are less conspicuous than they may appear at first sight: “As it has historically, the world of Islam may do more to define and shape Europe in the twenty-first century than the United States, Russia or even the European Union” (Savage, 2008, 298). The statement

has obvious extreme overtones, but these do not make it less valid. The validity is given by two related factors: the geographical proximity of Islam to Europe and the widening demographic imbalance between these two geographical regions.

Let us focus on the first factor. Arab countries, which make an important part of the Muslim world, lie south and southeast of Europe. Middle East and North African countries make together the world's 2nd region in terms of fertility rates (South Asia ranking first). Today, 360 million people live in this region and "the population of the Arab world is expected to grow some 40% over the next two decades. That amounts to almost 150 million additional people, the equivalent of two new Egypts" (*The Economist*, July 25th - 31st, 2009). So, within two decades, the population living in this part of the world will equal the population of the entire European Union. Besides, "Arab countries already have the lowest employment rate in the world and one of the highest rates of youth unemployment, with about one in five young people out of work" (*idem*).

A quick look into the patterns of immigration flows to Europe shows that they follow the traditional links with the powers of Europe. People from the Maghreb choose France, those from Pakistan and India Great Britain, while the Turks go to Germany. 90% of the immigrants settling in Europe after 1990 are of Islamic origin. Geographical proximity, historical links with Europe and the downturn trend of European population account for this figure. At the same time, geopolitics teaches us that the sea unites rather than divides. States on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea may be considered the southern flank of the European continent, a natural extension of it. Europe's prosperity acts like an invitation for people inhabiting the former colonies to come and get the grip over the territories of their former masters.

Migration is the first way in which Islam is shaping Europe today. The dynamics of the Islamic population already settled in Europe is the second. Currently, there are 25 million Muslims spread across different European countries: 5 million in France, 4 million in Germany, 3 million in the UK etc. They make 5% of the entire EU population. So, the situation as it looks today may not be so alarming; rather, it is the tendency that makes the difference. The average birth rate among Muslim population is three times higher than of the European one. For the last 3 decades, Islamic population in Europe has doubled and it will double again until 2015-2020, while non-Muslim population will decrease with 3.5%. These two complementary phenomena – the accelerated growth of Islamic population and the downturn trend of the European population impact Europe's demographic outlook. The percentage of Islamic population out of the total European population is projected to increase from 5 to 20% in 2050. One should not discard this as a mere exaggerated forecast given the striking differences between the birth rates of the two population groups.

The problem is compounded by the fact that Muslim population is heavily concentrated in big urban areas. Birmingham, the second largest city in UK, offers an interesting case in point. Based on the high fertility rate of the Pakistani population, there are estimates that white people in Birmingham will be a minority by 2027. 35 towns and cities in Great Britain already have at least one constituency that is minority white (Hope, 2007). This is the general pattern of Islamic demographic expansion: first, people of Muslim origin concentrate in an urban neighborhood; afterwards, due to high fertility rates, the surrounding areas of that neighborhood are gradually occupied.

What may look like a minor phenomenon today will gain in importance in just a few decades. The situation will not be that dramatic as long as the number of Muslims living in Europe will be less than 50 million. But once this demographic milestone is reached, the accompanying phenomena will be very difficult to contain.

It is also worth mentioning that current demographic asymmetries are sometimes presented in an alarmist, even apocalyptic manner. Notwithstanding the scale of the demographic phenomena, related analyses should be both realistic and balanced. Forecasts that are premised on the constant or even rising fertility rate among Muslim or African populations will not be all confirmed. History shows that economic welfare slows down population growth. This has been the trend in East Asia and this will likely be the trend in Africa, too. Let us take Africa as an example. 1 in 2 Africans is a child. In 1850, the population of Africa was 110 million; today, it is 1 billion. And if the current tendencies hold, it will reach 2 billion in 2050 (The Economist, August 29th - September 4th, 2009). For the past few years, a different tendency has emerged, although not very vigorously: the birth rate is slowly declining. This may slow down the pace of population growth and may increase the likelihood to maintain a minimum balance of the ecosystem. Urban, middle-class, higher-income families have fewer children.

How the world's demographic future will look like is a subject of debate. Still, there are some common elements that defy controversy. First, there is wide agreement that population will keep on growing during the former part of the century, albeit at a slower rate. The latter part of the century will mark a demographic turning point. The growth will be slow, meaning about 10% and, in absolute terms 9-10 billion persons (Cartwright, 2008, 47). There are estimates that world population will even decline in absolute terms. Irrespective of differences in scenarios and forecasts, the correlation between economic welfare and population downturn will still hold.

Muslim population is characterized by a different religious and cultural pattern. Its participation into the global development processes worldwide will slow down its

demographic growth, too. What is at stake is the social integration of Muslims in Europe. Some European states, such as France or Great Britain grant citizenship to Muslims as an incentive for social integration. Such efforts should be the basis for designing a comprehensive strategy for the EU as a whole. A similar comprehensive strategy needs to be designed for the Maghreb and the Middle East.

According to Michael S. Teitelbaum and Jay Winter (2004), the slow pace of demographic change makes room for corrective actions; policies can accelerate or slow down an already existing trend. At the same time, population growth is strongly connected to the cultural pattern; consequently, turning around such a complex behavior as child bearing asks for well-designed, well-timed and long-term interventions. The complexity of any endeavor to change existing demographic trends does not mean that demography is destiny.

In terms of urgency and importance, EU demographic phenomena outrank the relationship with other global players. The former take place in EU near abroad, in its backyard, so to say. The weight of Muslim population in EU affairs will increase and it will be political, economical and cultural in nature. Three Muslim states already exist on the European territory – Albania, Bosnia and Kosovo. There are 23 million Muslim living in Russia, meaning that 1 in 6 inhabitants is Muslim. Big demographic pressures are exerted in the southern part of Russia by the Central Asian Muslim states.

The impact of the strong Muslim presence in the EU is multilayered. One layer is created by the objective reality as such – the numbers are self-explanatory –, another by the perception and the reaction to the respective reality. Xenophobic, far right wing reactions have already been documented. The next decade is highly significant in this respect. “The percentage of Muslims in France is rapidly approaching that of African-Americans in the United States in 1950 (10%), and the percentage of Muslims in Europe as a whole will pass the benchmark within the next decade” (Savage, 2008, 321). Demographic evolutions have not been dramatic in the US because the growth of African-American population eventually came to a standstill. The differences between fertility rates among Muslim and European population and European population are still very high. As a result, it is estimated that in 2050, Muslims will comprise 20 to 25% of Europe’s population or even more in countries such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. These figures ask for a unified EU strategy in the field of demography.

3. Mexico’s expansion into the US

The pattern of demographic flows between Mexico and the US resembles that between Islam and Europe to a great extent. In both cases, the more prosperous

regions exert a lot of magnetism on the less developed, but overpopulated ones. The big demographic imbalances between Mexico and the US are created by the different fertility rates among the two populations. Mexico is among the top 5 countries ranked by population growth, after Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and India. Its population was 27 million in 1950 and is 110 million today. So, its population increased fourfold in 60 years.

There are also marked differences. First, Mexico shares a borderland with the US. Until the middle of the 19th century, Mexico had possessed some territories that now belong to the US –Florida, Texas, New Mexico, California, Utah, Arizona, Nevada. These are highly integrated into the US and are genuine US landmarks, especially California, Texas, and Florida; yet, the Mexicans inhabiting these territories have stuck to their language and customs. Among other things, this was possible because the US-Mexican border has never been too clearly cut. People on both sides of the border have always been in close contact. The Mexicans settling in the US came home somehow, counting on finding cultural and psychological support, an environment where their language and customs could be preserved. Hence, it is not by chance that the Mexican immigrants have chosen the old Mexican territories as their landing base over time.

Second, Mexico's economy has been growing at constant and significant rates for the past few years as a result of globalization, NAFTA membership, and the possession of important oil reserves. Mexico ranks 15th in world's economic hierarchy, immediately after Australia. It is now part of G20 and is considered an emerging regional power. Its strengths are generally acknowledged to be the size of the population, coastline with two oceans (the Pacific and the Atlantic), a geographical trait that only the US and Canada possess, the wise exploitation of natural resources and of the special economic context of the past few years. Its development strategy is both thorough and modern, as George Friedman clearly underlines. For example, "oil constituted about 60% of Mexico's exports in 1980, but by 2000 it was only about 7%". Services now account for 70% of Mexico's GDP, and agriculture for only about 4%. According to the same author, the Mexican migration has strong financial consequences. „Remittances to Mexico have surged and are now its second-largest source of foreign income. In most countries, foreign investment is the primary means for developing the economy. In Mexico, investment by foreigners is being matched by foreign remittances” (Friedman, 2009, 232).

Inside the US, Hispanic population – which is predominantly Mexican – has increased dramatically over the past few years. African-American population has stabilized at around 30 million, meaning 10% of the entire US population. The Asian population accounts for 4% and is slowly rising. The only population with an accelerated growth rate is that of Hispanic origin, making it the most important

minority in the US. During the 2002 census, it accounted for 12.5% of the US population and this percentage reached 13% in just another year. In absolute terms, this is 40 million people. The pattern of immigration between Mexico and the US is not a regular one; it does not mean the movement of big numbers of people across the ocean, miles away from home. Rather it is “a movement into a borderland between two nations” (Friedman, 2009, 225). The Mexican population can move freely across the border. The bond with the homeland is therefore strong. People choosing to immigrate do not give up their language and customs; rather they move back and forth across the border and this continuous movement creates demographic as well as cultural pockets inside the US. What 20-30 years ago were isolated demographic pockets scattered along the border have been growing larger and larger and have come to be concentrated in the big south and south-western states. Their expansion is somehow decelerated these days, but it is still an unfolding phenomenon. There are estimates according to which, in 2050, Hispanic population will be a majority in these states. In other terms, we are not dealing with a simple migration process, but with Mexico’s expansion into the US. This is how George Friedman describes the whole process: “the cultural border of Mexico shifts northward even though the political border remains static” (p. 236).

Borderlands are by definition areas characterized by cultural, economic and demographic interference. This is where cultural values as well as people meet and mingle. As a result, borderlands are inhabited by a mixed population, made up of citizens of the home country as well as people originating in the neighboring country. US-Mexican border is a unique place because both sides are inhabited by Mexican people who maintain a strong bond with their homeland. If the current tendencies are maintained, within a few decades, Mexican people will constitute the dominant population along a line running at least two hundred miles from the US-Mexican border through California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas and throughout vast areas of the Mexican Cession. In real terms, the border no longer retains its classical meaning. It continues to separate two states but demographically it separates people that speak the same language and share the same culture. This is the fundamental feature of the US-Mexican demographic process. And this feature may cause unrest tensions and even conflicts, in spite of the fact that the two countries are currently engaged in blooming economic and commercial ties.

The immigration process – be it legal or illegal – will continue and will contribute to the growing size of Mexican population living in the US. The high fertility rate is the factor that makes Mexican population prevalent in US southern states. According to *The Economist* (July 11th-17th, 2009), in 2007, more than 50% of the children born in Texas were Latinos, even though the entire Latino population accounts for only 38% of that state’s population. Assuming that the border is closed tomorrow, Latinos would become a majority by 2034 or even in 2015, depending

on different assumptions. Texas may provide a more extreme example, but is representative for the demographic process as a whole. Provided that the current demographic trends hold, many other American states will look just like Texas. Today, there are only 4 minority/majority states, meaning states where the population that is a majority at the US level represents a minority: California, Texas, Hawaii and New Mexico. The Economist estimates that the 2010 census will indicate 10-12 such states and that around 2050 the entire US will be a minority/majority state (idem).

This demographic process has been expressively labeled as a “peaceful reconquista”, meaning a quiet seizure of the territories that once belonged to Mexico. Irrespective of whether we agree to such an extreme interpretation or not, it is certain that unequal demographical rates breed long-term, largely irreversible tendencies. Perhaps more than in other fields, demographic processes are to be judged by their consequences. Co-existence of distinct demographic groups with different growth rates within the same territory leads to dramatic changes in the demographic profile of that territory.

According to the figures provided by S. Huntington, “in 1961 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the population was 43% Serb and 26% Muslims. In 1991, it was 31% Serb and 44% Muslim (Huntington, 2004, 218). The long series of bloody conflicts that swept the Balkans throughout the last decade is all too familiar and demography was one of the underlying causes of these conflicts. The same pattern applies to Kosovo, only that the dramatic character is increased by the fact that Kosovo is the cradle of Serbian civilization. Unequal demographic evolutions made the Serbs living in Kosovo account for less than 15% of the entire population. The secession of Kosovo and its transformation into a separate political entity has divided the European states into strong supporters and opponents. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the arguments and counterarguments of each party. We just want to underline the following situation. Kosovo is, as we said, the cradle of Serbian civilization. Now it is inhabited by a totally different population. To whom does Kosovo belong?

Coming back to the US, figures show that, “in 1990 the population of California was 57% White and 26% Hispanic. In 2040 it is predicted to be 31% White and 48% Hispanic... As the racial balance continues to shift and more Hispanics become citizens and politically active, white groups may look for other means of protecting their interests.” What will be the likely reaction of the American leadership? Will ethnic cleansing ensue, like it did in former Yugoslavia? What we know for sure is that the demographic balance is changing slowly but surely, that within the next few decades, the demographic profile of that state and of a series of other states such as Texas and New Mexico will change dramatically, which will have important cultural and political consequences. One of the most visible cultural consequences

will be the relationship between the language used by the former majority population and that used by the ascending population, between English and Spanish. The role of Spanish increases with the increase of the Spanish population itself. Adjustment to this new reality is complex and, among other things, it raises issues regarding the national identity, even breeds reactions to stick to this identity by all means. The recent history of the US provides a relevant illustration of changing realities. The mayors of San Antonio (Texas) and Los Angeles (California) are both Hispanic. During the electoral contest, there were situations in which the counter candidates were of a Hispanic origin, too; consequently, the language that they used in TV debates was Spanish. That created a big source of discomfort for non-Spanish speaking Americans.

The standard answer to such challenges is: integration, the design and implementation of policies that forge common values, common life styles. These policies have proved effective with Asian people residing in the US. They are generally well educated and willing to succeed, which is shown, for example, by the number of Asian students affiliated to science and engineering departments: at the beginning of 2000, more than 25% of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, more than 20% of Berkeley and Stanford students, and more than 15% of Harvard students were of Asian origin (Barral, 2003, 23). They are more or less integrated within the American society, are fluent in English, occupy management positions, share the organizational values and ethics of the organizations where they work, which are all signs of integration. The situation is different with the Hispanic population. Their education attainment is relatively low, their poor knowledge of English keeps them connected only with their own communities, which considerably slows down the integration process. As the number of this population increases and the southern and south-western states become predominantly Hispanic, integration will become even less likely. A “Hispanic” world is emerging which sends the more or less explicit message that, for example, knowing English is irrelevant, since it is not used in „our world”. George Friedman speaks even of „a sub-national bloc, on the order of Quebec in Canada” (2009, 240) that is about to emerge right on the US territory.

California and the US as a whole have a long record of multiculturalism and tolerance to other races, cultures, life styles. That makes the occurrence of such phenomena as ethnic cleansing less likely. It is more likely that history will witness a genuine historic experiment, a process of mutual adjustment, a break away from strong traditional identities. At the same time, when population of California will be more than 50% Hispanic – which will happen in less than 50 years – the cultural, political and social processes entailed by this demographic profile will force one to reconsider more deeply questions such as: to whom does California belong? Or Texas? Or New Mexico? Or...

4. The Amur River: a Demographic Battlefield

Russia incorporates two vast regions, Siberia and Russian Far East, whose combined size is five times bigger than the territory of the European Russia (Khanna, 2008, 82). The geopolitical significance of these two regions is threefold. First, they are rich in natural resources. Until now, harsh climate has prevented their exploitation. New technologies may soon change that, hence the Russian government's heavy investments in such technologies. Provided technological breakthroughs that will allow the exploitation of these resources appear, the geopolitical importance of these regions will increase even more.

Second, they provide Russia with access to the Pacific Ocean. We usually think of the European Russia and ignore the fact that it has a huge access to the Pacific Ocean. The significance of the Pacific Ocean has increased tremendously as a result of the rise of Japan, then of China and eventually of the whole Asia. Siberia's natural resources – once tapped with – will be supplied to the Asian partners via Pacific. East Asia's rapid development places Russia in a position to be geopolitically connected to two important economic areas: the European and the Asian one. Traditionally, only the European extreme has been considered but Asia's rapid ascent forces one to reconsider the other extreme, too.

Third, these regions make what Mackinder called the “heartland”, the “geographical pivot of history”, that showed invulnerability to land invasion over history. Being a representative of the major sea power of the moment, Mackinder was aware of the huge advantage created by the control over the territories of the sea. He also feared the rise of the new power – Russia – which was also a massive land power. The conquest of such a massive and compact piece of land seemed an impossible task back then. Today, the world witnesses a new phenomenon: a quiet “conquest” of the heartland by means of “suitcases” instead of tanks and armored vehicles. Mackinder could have hardly predicted this by since demography was not an issue when he came up with his theory. He could not have predicted that demography would triumph over geography, that it would come to challenge old-centuries patterns of how geopolitical strengths are gained and preserved.

The banks of river Amur are inhabited by two “demographic armies”. The Russian army has 7 million “soldiers”, while the Chinese 148 million (*Le Monde*, Mercredi 8 juillet, 2009). We are using the term “army” in order to suggest that we deal with a special type of confrontation, even though no weapons are involved; the role of weapons is taken by people and by the different fertility rates among them.

The demographic pressure at the Russian-Chinese border is created by a series of important factors. The net difference between Russian and the Chinese population is huge. Second, the size of the territory inhabited by the Russian population is

incommensurate to its size, and this discrepancy makes it one of the most sparsely populated areas on earth. Under population is caused by the harsh in the first place. This is why, during Soviet years, a system of subsidies was in place to attract and retain people in this area. These subsidies are no longer provided. The fact that the region is cut off from the European Russia and the general economic decline of the former Soviet space added to the climate-related problems and pushed the population once living there to more prosperous and central regions. This population has left behind a genuine demographic “vacuum”, which acts like a magnet for the Chinese population on the other side of the river Amur.

Demographic imbalances are amplified by the different intensity of trade-related activities. And trade is acknowledged to be one of the most efficient means to project geopolitical influence over a region. According to *Le Monde*, “everything stagnates on this side of the river, everything flourishes on the other” (*Le Monde*, Mercredi 8 juillet, 2009). It is reasonable to assume that the same demographic imbalance measured in absolute terms would not have created the same pressure 30 years ago. China was a big country back then, but not an ascending power. China has embarked on a huge and comprehensive process of modernization and the majority of the Chinese population feels part of this huge modernization process and is deeply committed to it. That spirit of belonging to a greater endeavor permeates every aspect of Chinese life and is manifest in the Amur area, too. The Russians living on the other side can feel directly the vibrant and flourishing pace of life. They are in direct contact with the Chinese people that come to Siberia and the Russian Far East armed with full confidence that they will prevail. The Chinese language is the second language spoken there, Chinese businessmen own the majority of companies, and more and more mixed families are formed between Chinese men and Russian women. Around half a million Chinese settle in Siberia and the Russian Far East annually – the size of Russia’s annual population loss.

According to Parag Khanna, Europe and the US will back Russia in order to counterbalance that quiet demographic expansion of China into Russian territories (Khanna, 2008). These two superpowers would rather see that Russia holds on to its territory in Siberia and the Far East. Their preference is strategically grounded: this territory is the main gateway connecting the resource-rich Central Asia and the Pacific. The fundamental problem is that the expansion is demography-driven, thus challenging traditional thinking about the means to counterbalance it. Europe and the US are confronted with sensitive demographic problems themselves. That makes it difficult for them to make policy recommendations that are meant to contain demographic pressures.

It is worth mentioning that the demographic processes at the Russian-Chinese border do not happen by design. They have the force of a quasi-natural

phenomenon: the demographic vacuum created by a shrinking Russian population attracts the Chinese booming population. The matter is not one of someone causing a threat to Russia in this region, even though the processes as such can be nurtured by political or geopolitical interests. The origin of such processes lies in the demographic features of the area, in the fact that these territories could drift away of their own accord. A clash is unlikely as of this moment mainly because it is in nobody's interest. If current trends continue, China will find itself in an advantageous position while Russia will find it difficult to react to the quiet threat posed by demography. Especially in today's world, the huge migration flows cannot be contained by artificial means such as tightly sealed borders. Containment is possible only by opposing an equally strong population and Russia's demographic free fall makes this solution unrealistic.

Russia's hold on Siberia and the Russian Far East is likely to continue for a while, yet the Chinese dominance will be stronger and stronger. History shows that until now demography has always triumphed over geography. Once a population becomes the dominant group in an area, it will eventually have territorial claims to it. The situation depicted above involves two world superpowers, adding to the complexity of the issue and to its global significance. Predictions may be fallible, yet two things are almost certain. First, Russia will continue to be a military superpower and will invest most of its energy and attention to preserve or even extend that status. Second, the relationship between Russia and China will become more tense in the long run. Traditionally, the two countries have been geo-strategic partners, given the common opposition to the US. This pattern of cooperation is changing with China's rise, turning that country into Russia's ultimate geopolitical enemy. The core of the problem lies with the fact that territories that have traditionally belonged to Russia's sphere of influence are drifting economically and demographically to China.

The world looks very different today than it did 50 or 60 years ago. The main changes are technology-driven: half a century ago, computers did not exist, television was at the beginning, satellite transmissions, car driving and plane travel were very rare or downright inconceivable. These were all fast and spectacular developments, testifying to the role of technology in forging fundamental changes. Contemporary processes reveal a deeper layer that also has the capacity to change existing patterns irreversibly. It is the layer of demography, together with all the processes entailed by it – unequal demographic evolution of groups and communities, spatial movements and migration, changing patterns of population distribution within a country, group of countries or a world region, different demographic densities of various territories. These are quiet, long-term, and less visible processes, which partly accounts for them not being discussed too heavily. Since they have to do with the long term, it is possible that a generation

does not have time to sense them properly, while the next finds it too late to fight or reverse them. From one generation to the next, what was just a barely noticeable tendency may become an irreversible, “natural” reality.

Unequal demographic rates pose a major challenge to identities of any kind: group, regional or national identities. Technology creates disparities, but demographic imbalances breed long-lasting instability. The current demographic processes shift the tectonic plates that history has slowly accumulated in the shape of habits, values, cultures. These tectonic shifts will likely awaken identities and claims to identity, creating the proper ground for tensions, clashes, even open conflicts.

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