

Wilhelm Guschlbauer Ph.D. - France

Dear Sir,

Your “world view” published in the Irish Times – “The contradictions of the anti-globalisation protests” interested me considerably and I would like to take this opportunity to respond to your arguments.

You are kind enough to admit that globalisation has its disadvantages. I would just like to mention a few side-effects of globalisation in Europe which the EU authorities can verify and act upon.

The Belgian truck which caused the catastrophe in the Mont-Blanc tunnel was delivering margarine to Italy – probably made with sunflower seeds from Italy or Spain. The Brenner-Kufstein highway is full of stainless-steel Italian trucks. They bring milk from Italy to Bavaria where it is transformed into yoghurt. This is then trucked to Brindisi, takes the ferry to Greece where it is transformed into feta cheese, which in turn is trucked back to Europe to be sold as “Greek” feta cheese. Farmers in Northern Germany truck their dirty potatoes to Calabria and Sicily to be washed in areas where water is scarce. They are then shipped back to Germany.

Because of “trade at any cost”, a country like France, which has huge surpluses of quality food, imports Irish lamb, British beef, Dutch tomatoes, Danish cheese – all of a quality inferior to that produced locally. Again, millions of trucks are involved. To be “competitive” and to swamp the market, certain French farmers have constructed giant pig farms, often illegally. As a result, prices for pork have plummeted and in places like Brittany the local water is not fit for human consumption.

Has anybody noticed that in the four planes which were crashed on September 11, there were 257 passengers, including 19 terrorists? The four aircraft had a total capacity of over 1,200 passengers. In other words, they were 80 percent empty. Is it surprising that the airline industry is on the brink of disaster if it works with such low productivity?

All these trucks and half-empty planes contribute to pollution and the warming of the atmosphere.



Your question “what is suddenly so wrong with globalisation?” is either falsely naive or very cunning. Globalisation has not brought only “prosperity and well-being to countries where there was only poverty and decline” – and you know it. So why are Calabria, Sicily or the Basilicate still in such a desolate state? Or Extremadura? Or the former East Germany? Not to mention Belarus, Ukraine and large swathes of Russia.

Globalisation has never taken into account the political, social, cultural and religious circumstances of a given country. Poverty has not declined but risen in countries like Brazil, Indonesia, even parts of the US – not to mention Africa and some countries in Latin America or Central Asia.

The main problem of globalisation is that it has served essentially multinational business interests which are largely, but not exclusively, American and which care as much about improving the plight of local populations as the fox cares about the chicken. By sheer chance, the secret Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was exposed in time and opposed by the EU. Otherwise we would not be subjects of France, Belgium, Germany or Austria now, but of Unilever, Macdonalds, Murdoch, Kodak, Vivendi, Total-Fina-Elf, Shell, Microsoft or Chevron.

Contrary to your statement about “no textiles from Third World countries,” virtually all textiles and many manufactured goods are delocalised and come from Third World countries. You can’t buy jeans many anywhere but Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey. Most computers are made in Malaysia, China and Taiwan. Volkswagen produces the Polo in the Czech Republic and Portugal, but not in Germany. Nike sport shoes, which sell for 80-120 Euro in Europe, are made by young women in South East Asia who are paid \$5 a day. During the 1998 World Cup in France, it was revealed that the hundreds of footballs used during the matches were hand stitched by 11 and 12-year-old boys in Pakistan on a daily wage of about 5 Euro.

In 10 years’ time you will not be able to buy products manufactured in the EU. Granted, this gives employment to some poor bleeder in a foreign land, but under what conditions? Is this our “model” of democracy?

A further upshot of liberalised globalisation is the incredible development of organised crime. The mafia, drugs dealers and arms merchants are flourishing, largely thanks to the opening up of financial possibilities in off-shore tax havens such as the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, as well as in the UK,



Luxembourg, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, and – more recently – in Hungary and Bulgaria, too. This has been highlighted by recent revelations about terrorist funding. The events of 11 September have not stopped serious magazines like Newsweek from publishing ads for three off-shore companies this week.

The EU has been lulled into political insignificance by a cohort of “liberalisers” – led by the British – who want to privatise everything. The British railways, water and health systems are in such an abysmal state that they are certainly not models to be followed. The experience of Deutsche Bahn A.G. is also far from convincing: luxury trains, but very expensive and always late. The havoc which the lax veterinary controls in the UK have caused in recent years have cost the EU billions of euros. And never fall ill in the USA. You could end up financially ruined.

Have our politicians not understood that our wasteful lifestyle in general, and globalisation in particular, have antagonised more people around the globe than the colonial past? That democracy is a purely Western product and not necessarily ready for export? That the so-called “democracy” of globalisation, shown to the developing world, is a blueprint for disaster? That globalisation is an unproven hypothesis?

The hubris of the globalisers is to suggest that globalisation is a panacea for the world. It is not. As a scientist I can only refuse such flimsy argumentation. Isn't it about time we halted globalisation, decreed a moratorium and took time to reflect on its usefulness, its dangers and its ecological, social and cultural impact, rather than just the commercial interests?

This brings me on to genetically modified organisms – something I understand well, since my laboratory has been involved in cloning for basic research. Your case for genetically modified vegetables is economically and scientifically untenable. The Western world has strictly no need for genetically modified food. We have such surpluses of food of all kinds that further “productivity” would be a financial, social and ecological disaster for the EU and the US. We don't need genetically modified corn or wheat. We already spend billions of euros on storing carcasses, wheat, butter... almost everything, in fact.

Besides, the innocuousness of genetically modified food is not proven scientifically. There have been accidents where toxins have been cloned into vegetables by error. I am far from convinced that a foolproof procedure will ever exist.



The theory that genetically modified plants or animals could “feed the third world” is potentially worthy of consideration. José Marie Bové, father of the anti-globalist protester José Bové, is an excellent geneticist, with whom I worked many years ago. He envisages the introduction of genes for the synthesis of certain vitamins and other essential nutrients. This is leading edge research with a specific, albeit limited, view and – evidently – is of no interest to Monsanto, Bayer or Aventis, since they would never make any money out of it. See the incredible stir the anti-Aids drug affair caused in Africa. The drugs companies are not eager for a repeat performance. Large companies will never put a penny into such things. CIBA-Geigy (now Novartis) stopped producing the only anti-bilharziosis drug years ago, simply because it wasn't making any money from it, and even though this millions of Africans are concerned.

Your statement that “what we need is a global ethical approach to the environment, labour relations and monetary policy” is all well and fine, and I agree completely. However, since 1989, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the downfall of communism, globalisation has exploded and we have seen precisely the contrary. The Bush administration has decided not to ratify the Kyoto protocol, since this could have an impact on Big Oil which paid for Bush's campaign. Instead it is looking to violate the 1972 agreement on biological and chemical weapons and renounce the ABM treaty. Every political action today is dominated exclusively by the outlook for financial profit. “Shareholder value” has become the anthem of globalisation.

Yes, we need a global political body as powerful as the globalised market in which we already live. We need it badly! So how about pushing a few countries – starting with the United States – to cough up the years of arrears they owe to the UN, which is practically broke?

I am very afraid that even as the prime minister of a small, but important and respected country it will not be in your power to do much. You may have to console yourself with making suggestions. But do we have the will and the possibility to face up to the market? Have we not already reached the point of no-return?

Still, with my best wishes for success,

Yours faithfully,

Wilhelm Guschlbauer Ph.D.
France

