



**GLOBSEC**

IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD

Conference report

**Regional Conflicts, Global  
Consequences: Democracies vs  
Autocracies**

## FOREWORD

The international order has changed significantly since the start of the war in Ukraine, as it has formalized the division between autocracies and democracies. It has shed renewed spotlight on the tension between the debatably diminishing dominance of the liberal democracy, and the potentially rising influence of autocratic states. How has the Russian aggression in Ukraine shifted the balance of power in the global security arena? How has the discussion on global security changed, and to what direction? What does the Russian aggression mean for Taiwan? In addition to the geopolitical consequences of the conflict, the war in Ukraine is also significantly impacting the global economic stability, already vulnerable after the COVID-19 pandemic. With a recent show of strength and geopolitical manoeuvres around Taiwan, the already strained supply chains are being put at risk once again. How are the democratic countries preparing for supply chain challenges? How can states and businesses shield their supply chains in the face of war? How can Taiwan and Europe forge economic synergies along their key strategic supply chains? These are some of the questions answered during the conference, which gathered experts and representatives of the public and private sector from Taiwan, Slovakia, and the wider CEE region.

## OPENING

Róbert Vass, President of GLOBSEC, drawing a parallel to the previous edition of this event, where the main topic was the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, stated that we are again facing an unprecedented challenge. In today's world, which is more interconnected than ever, regional conflicts have global consequences. This is the case with the invasion of Ukraine, which is impacting the world at large. The war is not just a fight for the freedom of Ukraine, but a conflict between imperialism and democracy, which will not withstand if democracies compromise their values. Mr Vass ended his introduction by stating that this is a war in which we are all involved, and either we lose, or we get out of this crisis much stronger.

Dr Ming-Yen Tsai, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan), also reflected on how the war is having effects far beyond the borders of Russia and Ukraine, with refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries or the weaponization of supplies that is causing global energy and food crises. In condemning Russia's actions, Taiwan aligns itself with Slovakia and other international partners that are providing assistance to Ukraine.



Dr Tsai also warned about the importance for the international community to support Taiwan, which is facing constant threat from China, a country that is using its political influence to exclude Taiwan from the international order. With recurrent military exercises happening on Taiwan's borders, as well as continuous intrusions over its air defence identification zone, China is becoming increasingly assertive as it seeks to establish a new world order.

The Deputy Minister considered that, whilst the world is now focused on Ukraine, we should not lose sight of what is happening in Taiwan, as he considers the danger of a conflict with China to potentially have much more severe consequences for the world. In his words, "Russia is a storm, China is climate change". Thus, it is fundamental that the international community unites to send a clear message on its determination to defend the values of democracy.

## **GLOBAL CONTEST BETWEEN DEMOCRACIES AND AUTOCRACIES**

The war in Ukraine has been a game changer in international geopolitics, as it has become a global challenge with global consequences. As US President Biden said, this is “a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force”. As Ingrid Brocková, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, truly pointed out - to ensure that democracy prevails, we need to strengthen the rule of law and build resilient societies.

The role of civil society cannot be understated. In these moments of crisis, it will be more important than ever to increase the collaboration between governments and civil society. If the goal is to have a value-based foreign policy, it is necessary that every single democratic country protects journalists, fights corruption, ensure diversity and inclusion, provide better education, and persistently aim to counter disinformation and build societal resilience.

From economic perspective, democracies throughout the world must end their dependency on autocratic regimes.. Member of the European Parliament, Ivan Štefanec, stated that ending this dependency is, and will continue to be, strenuous for our societies as it will result in severe economic shocks. However, in this situation, and as explained by Robin Shepherd, it is the role of leaders across the world and especially in Europe to explain that in order to preserve democracies and liberal values in a long term, short-term sacrifice needs to be made. The energy transition will play a key role in this process. One of the lessons learnt from this situation is that we need to end the fossil fuel consumption and move towards renewable energy much faster than previously thought, which could also mean having to use nuclear energy as a transitional source of energy.

These crises the EU is currently facing, however, have also created an unprecedented unity, evidenced by the Union’s commitment to deliver weapons, humanitarian aid and financial assistance, showing great solidarity and support to Ukraine. This support was also evidenced through the efforts to isolate Russia from the international community through the imposition of international sanctions. This approach, however, while it could be successful for this conflict, might not have the same impact in other parts of the world. While China and Russia do share some similarities, the former is much more integrated in the international economic order. The imposition of sanctions against China would end globalization as we know it, which would have extreme consequences for most countries in the world. This puts China in an advantageous position when it comes to its claims over Taiwan. However, as Dr. Tsai stated, raising the economic costs of an invasion could help as a deterrent.

China, similar to Russia, also faces certain vulnerabilities. Democracies should be cooperating amongst each other in a more effective way. As Roland Freudenstein, Head of GLOBSEC Brussels, warned, the United Nations Security Council cannot be the forum for this sort of cooperation, as it is not a guarantee against autocracy. Democracies will have to rely on other instruments to ensure countries like Russia and China respect international norms.



## GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS IN THE FACE OF WAR

The Russian war has created shockwaves around the world, forcing changes on the global stage and showing that economics, geopolitics, and security are evermore interconnected. Similarly to the COVID-19 pandemic, the war has exposed the risks of overreliance on a single supplier, especially when it comes to critical materials. Without doubt, the international communities have built trade policies on the assumption that trade and globalization would lead to an increased political freedom. Consequently, abiding to the values of international trade and political freedom, democracies across the world have become too dependent on autocracies, which have not been hesitant to weaponize their advantages. Learning the lessons from Russian unprecedented aggression, the time has come to change the status quo.

There is an increasing need for resilient economies, especially in Europe – to be able to recover from crises and adapt to new conditions. This for the most part also includes resilient supply chains. There are several key steps ahead. Firstly, an essential tool to increasing resilience will be a considerable investment into research, development and innovation. Secondly, avoiding isolation and pursuing international cooperation with likeminded countries will be of utmost importance. Third, broadening diplomatic relations around the world to actually build solid relations. For instance, relation between Europe and Taiwan could serve as an inspiration. While the first has better research facilities, the second excels in production. Sharing of knowledge and capabilities could benefit both sides and increase resilience for both partners. Building meaningful relations and avoiding autocracies weaponizing trade relations is to become a crucial step ahead.

Democracies should not be naive about the real intentions of countries like Russia and China. Yet, while isolating autocracies entirely is not a possibility, it is necessary to ensure that there is an imminent reduction of dependencies on these countries. Instead, democracies shall be the ones setting the international norms and rules. However, to build economic resilience, countries must first ensure societal resilience. In the current state of play where geopolitical balance and the differences between democratic and autocratic regimes are visible more than ever, the governments need to remain transparent. Societies need to know and understand the reasons for current developments, they need to be engaged in an open and honest dialogue. This is the only way for democracies to move forward, whether it is in economic, political, societal or any other way.





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