

## **XVI Open Society Forum „Cosmopolitan Communications: Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World“**

**Tallinn, September 28, 2011**

### **Keynote speaker: Pippa Norris**

At the XVI Open Society Forum the political scientist and public speaker Pippa Norris raised an intriguing question: does our modern desire for cosmopolitanism and multicultural society mean losing some of our identity as a result? Based on research on the relationship between values and media consumption, a quick answer to that question would be: in the most cosmopolitan societies, the news media seems to strengthen trust in cultures with different values, and weaken the sense of nationalism.

Starting by defining globalization, Norris argued that the phenomenon is not new – the Roman Empire or the global trade relations in the 1880s, for example, were also forms of globalization. However, the 1970s brought a change, speeding up the interconnectedness of people and bringing along a swift movement of ideas, goods, services, culture and people across borders. In this context, cosmopolitan communications could be defined as the way we learn about and interact with people and places beyond our national borders.

However, the globalization that started in the 1970s has gone hand in hand with fears of cultural imperialism and the Western predominance eventually eliminating nations across the world. The sudden jump in the trends of economic, political and social globalization in the 1990s (partly caused by the rapid spread of the internet) again ignited fears of the American culture threatening national cultures, creating a new wave of cultural protectionism.

The production and export of cultural goods is indeed dominated by the Western world, the United States in particular. While the US is a major global exporter, there are also regionally important exporters, such as France in the francophone Africa, or India with its Bollywood movies in Asia. Estonia is an importer of cultural goods but not a big exporter.

There are several theories trying to explain the effect of the globalization of cultural markets:

- 1) Convergence – cultures learn from each other but due to the Western predominance other countries start adopting Western values. The question is what values and images popular American TV programs convey and how they will affect traditional values.
- 2) Polarization of national cultures – feeling threatened by the American culture, people choose to reject it. This has partly been the case in the Middle East.
- 3) Fusion – everybody influencing everybody. This can already be seen in the emergence of fusion cuisine, for instance.

However, since these models are all slightly exaggerated, Norris offers a more realistic alternative:

- 4) Firewall model – cultural exports will be available more widely but in order to actually impact on cultures, several firewalls need to be passed, including trade barriers, media freedom, poverty, and patterns of learning, which all limit the global flow of information.

Although globalization seems to be affecting everyone, there is a global gap in access to internet, mobile phones and television, resulting in different levels of globalization among different social strata. Globalization affects the middle class and the more educated people more than the lower

classes. In fact, the level of globalization among poorer people has remained almost the same over the past few decades.

An important source of information on the relationship between the scale of media use and the extent of cosmopolitanism is the World Values Survey (conducted in 1981-2007). The Cosmopolitanism Index used in the survey is composed of the KOF Index of Globalization, economic development, and media freedom. It appears the most cosmopolitan societies in the world are highly affluent societies, such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the US. In the comparison of more than a hundred countries, Estonia is among the top third. The least cosmopolitan societies are those most isolated in terms of economic development and information technology, e.g. Burma, Rwanda, Haiti.

Research on the patterns of news media consumption shows that trust in people of other nationalities and religions is higher in societies that use more media – the more you know, the more you trust. The type of society seems to have an important impact – parochial societies have significantly lower trust levels than cosmopolitan societies. Similarly, an active media user in a closed society trusts outsiders less than a more passive media user in an open society. The most trusting countries are, again, Norway, Sweden, the US, Britain, Finland; the least trusting is China. On the nationalism scale, the pattern seems to fit well: among the most nationalistic societies are Ghana, Rwanda, Mali, among the least nationalist Germany, Japan, Switzerland.

Hence, the more we use media, the more we trust people different from us. It works both between and inside countries. However, we still need to learn how these processes work: there are many other factors that contribute towards attitudes of nationalism and trust, and while we now know the impact of the news media, the impact of entertainment media has not been measured yet.

The increasing cosmopolitanism of communications and cultural globalization is both good and bad. Some countries in the EU are afraid of the weakening of national cultures and are turning to cultural protectionism; UNESCO is also worried about the survival of different languages and cultural heritage.

Discussing the role of the new media in politics, Pippa Norris argued that contrary to a popular belief, the Arab Spring was not ignited by social media. Twitter and Facebook did help mobilize people but its impact is exaggerated simply because many Western journalists relied on social media for information. However, the images transferred via social media are very powerful, making people want a democratic revolution. The problem is that it's not democratic elections that make a democracy. Real governance and an effective state capable of providing services to citizens is needed as well. As democracy will not be born overnight, there is going to be a tremendous amount of dissent, disappointment, and lack of governance.

Analyzing the future of learning, Norris said that people today have more knowledge about less, the use of media is more selective, fragmented, fractionalized. The internet potentially allows us to specialize on subjects that interest us and ignore the information we are not interested in.

Not everyone is willing to adapt to growing cosmopolitanism and globalization. The success of radical right parties in Europe can be interpreted as a backlash against multicultural communities, further fueled by the economic crisis and unemployment. As a general rule, the more interactions we have with others and the more we know about them, the more we trust them. At the same time, rapid globalization can have an opposite effect, increasing protectionism. It is possible to be cosmopolitan in terms of integration into global media, and be anti-multicultural at once.