
Economic Intelligence

Author: Valeriu Ivan, Romanian Academy

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Keywords: economic; economic security; economic intelligence; competitive intelligence; competitiveness; economy; economic war; recognition

Introduction

The strategic surprise of the fall of the Iron Curtain – without firing any gunshot after 40 years when both parties of the bipolar system had accumulated arsenals unprecedented in the history of humanity – also

determined the rapid occurrence of subsequent events. The Cold War era ended in 1989. From the time of formation of the North Atlantic Treaty, in 1949, the form and nature of international alliances have not experienced such a stage of fluctuation. The end of the Cold War set in motion a whole geostrategic architecture and it seems that the after-effects generated did not reach a state of equilibrium yet. On November 9, 1989, the old world died. On November 10, 1989, a new world was born.

Although opinions according to which with the events following the unforeseen and even less probable 09/11¹, history would end and a new era of peace and understanding would begin², the day of 11/09 (2001) inexorably arrived, a day that replaced in the Democratic world the image of the “red evil” – Communism with the “green evil” – islamo-fascism³.

The end of the ideological war marked the undisputed victory of capitalism and its adoption by the majority of states from what the former Soviet bloc and its sphere of influence have meant. The entire planet accepts this equilibrium – probably unstable – and the geo-economic context governing economic relations: Liberalism. Even China, which apparently maintains the Communist political system, has rapidly adapted its needs to the market economy, becoming one of the most important competitors on the global market.

But what happened with the enormous potential for conflict? Referring to a principle of physics, it can be asserted that nothing is lost, everything is transformed. What changed is the nature of conflicts and,

¹ The date on which the Wall that physically separated Berlin in two sides fell, was considered to have been November 9th 1989. This date was subsequently considered to be the start of the collapse of the Eastern European Communist Regime.

² See, Francis Fukuiama, *Sfârșitul istoriei și ultimul om* (The end of history and the last man), Publishing house Paideia, Bucharest, 1992. In the author's opinion, liberalism wins clearly in the confrontation with the other ideologies of the 20th century, such as Nazism and Bolshevism, and thus history reaches its end, being considered at that point a major philosophical thesis. Mankind has fulfilled its destiny by using liberal democracy, the perfect form of governing.

³ Controversial term, used by some authors to designate Extreme Islamism as the source of terrorism.

in a way, of the belligerents. The battles are no longer fought to conquer territories or to obtain autonomy or independence; conflict have become mainly economic, focusing on resources and markets. The main battles among villages, through companies and non-government organizations, are, first and foremost, economic in nature.

It remains to be seen which international actor will impose its supremacy. A hegemony that starts with knowing and adapting to the system of values characteristic of this new context – new only by its global characteristic – of the free market, almost unanimously accepted after 1989. The demand of information for economic expansion refers to what is specific to a society model, in terms of its social system, its lifestyle, its ethics, law, customs, traditions, cultural identity etc. The market does not bear any standard characteristics anywhere on the planet, whereas from one nation to another we are confronted with different visions of society and of the individual's relation with these, sometimes with conflicting components. The systems and society models differ in some cases critically within the same state of state organization (e.g. the Former Yugoslavia). The globalization of the market has occurred at an accelerated pace, however, not the same can be said about the values assumed by each individual/community/nation or culture.

The challenge of the moment seems to be the downturn of dominant values of the globalized future and of states and supranational entities which function as vectors of influence. Or, at least for the time being, there is no vector more adequate than economy to shape people's behavior from different societies. Globalization does not point towards ethical values, does not have its own path but will be the result of human actions. At the present moment we can say, by paraphrasing Heidegger, that it is the instinctive will to power, hidden under the mask of the desire for exchange.⁴

⁴ Willpower is a fundamental principle of existence: „all being is nothing more than willpower” – According to Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche's metaphysics, translation from German by Ionel Zamfir and Cătălin Cioabă, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2005, p.56.

Defeated by abandon, the planned Socialist economy has ended up in the chest of useless things of history. As a winner, market economy does not face any more obstacles ahead. Nevertheless, recent history shows us that, as its defeated adversary, it is not infallible. The dictum “let the market run and economic success will be guaranteed”, proved that companies, banks and event states can be brought to bankruptcy.

For the „invisible hand” of the market to operate correctly it is necessary that the rules of free competition are the same for all, and the relatively similar contextual conditions, the conditions met only by a market with perfect competition. But, the perfect competition does not exist altogether and completely isolated.

In the opinion of the economist Jean Gabszewicz⁵, four conditions must be present for a perfectly competitive market:

- a) large number of firms – a high number of sellers and buyers, so that isolated exchanges are not significant in the volume of total exchanges ;
- b) free entry – allow the apparition of new manufacturers, which are able to enter and exit the market easily;
- c) homogenous of products from the same branch – so that consumers are not interested from which seller they buy;
- d) perfect knowledge – companies and buyers are completely aware of the products and market prices.

The problem appears at the fourth criterion which presupposes that all economic agents (buyers and sellers) are completely aware of the price and quality of the product. Ideally, if this condition is fulfilled, there would be a unique price on the market, seller instantaneously aligning to this price. This condition is the most difficult to meet because not all market actor have the same information. Consequently, those who are properly informed have a competitive advantage and, theoretically, succeed in defeating the ones that are not informed or misinformed. The problem of information asymmetry, as it was called, has piqued the

⁵ Jean Gabszewicz, *Strategic Interaction and Markets*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

interest of researchers, and for unveiling its effects, George Akerlof, Michael Spence and Joseph Stiglitz have received the Nobel Prize for economy in 2001⁶.

The stake for each actor is to anticipate/know the actions of the competition, so that it is permanently one step ahead of them. Therefore, an actor needs to know as early as possible what the strategy of other actors is, in terms of research, production and sales. If an economic agent wants to produce more and cheaper, then the competition must be prepared to rapidly counteract this move. The competitive advantage is obtained by information, and information is obtained by means and methods that are reminiscent of the ones used in warfare.

The economic war is a relatively new concept⁷ controversial and hard to define. For the majority of specialists in international relations, a war can only be military. In fact, this is the classical definition of the term: armed conflict.

In a similar approach, the Larousse Dictionary, 2004 edition, provides the following definition: „war means the resorting to armed force to solve a conflicting situation between two or several organized groups: clans, factions, states. It consists in that each adversary tries to determine the other one to subject to its will”. In this definition there is a part that can be applied to the issue at hand. If a war means imposing your own will to another entity, then the economic variant of the term retains this objective. The issue at stage is to subject competition to your own will that is to reduce the enemy’s potential or to neutralize it.

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⁶ For further information please visit:

http://emilyskarbek.com/uploads/Asymmetric_Information_Contributions_of_Akerlof_Spence_and_Stiglitz.pdf

⁷ Not completely new. At the beginning of the 20th century there were a number of works that approached the economic expansion aspect, such as the work of Hausser, *Les méthodes allemandes d’expansion économique* (German methods of economic expansion), Paris, Armand Colin, 1915, that of Anton Zischka, *Japan in der Welt* (Japan in the world), 1936.

or wounded, but, usually, unemployed and poor, orphans of an economy which refuses to satisfy everybody's needs. Unethical and merciless in fulfilling a single objective: the permanent extension of its scope of influence. Companies are the main actors of this war in which they fight with or without the government's aid.

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With the new technologies in the field of information and communication, the blind spot of a company moves from the product or services towards information that allow the preservation of competitiveness of that product/services. What counts is less the product or the services, but the means for selling it „International competitiveness is no longer or to a lesser extent gained by technological performance (...) The simple quality-price relation no longer justifies the difference (...) Often, competition can be gained by knowing and preparing the field in terms of the human factor before receiving the actual commercial proposal, the capacity of determining and placing strategic targets, of stimulating the evolution, and then of using all the possible means to determine a decision in the wanted direction⁸ . There is no more such thing as uninfluenced economic competition. The influence of private as well as public factors. States need information to maintain their position on the international check board and to help companies.

In an age when the supply of information has significantly increased, the power belongs to the one who, at the adequate time, succeeds to collect, analyze and synthesize the fastest the data and information available in the competitive environment. Almost 90% of this stock is available because of data banks, the press, specialized publications, seminars and the internet. There are 10% considered highly

⁸ Jean Gabszewicz, *La concurrence imparfaite*, La Decouverte, Paris, 1994, pag.78.

important and sensitive that are generally obtained from closed sources and unfairly (grey information) or illegally (black information). The fiercest battles between international actors are fought for these 10%.

The ones that had the curiosity to ask questions learned that there are no rules in this game, and the lack of protection for economic interests/information does not spare and costs highly. An eloquent example is the document presented in France's National Assembly by the deputy Bernard Carayon in 2004, which clearly shows that irrespective of partnerships or international treaties, economic competition often remains outside regions⁹.

Some states are aware of this confrontation and in order to overcome new challenges, they have conceived, apply and reap the benefit of genuine doctrines of economic war.

Therefore, as early as 1975, the Washington administration set up a committee of foreign investments managed by the Treasury secretary, Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States, a committee that refused, for instance, the merger between Alcatel and Lucent, as well as the one scheduled between Outlast and the main American operator in the field of satellites. The Clinton administration showed particular interest in strengthening the intelligence economic means: in 1993, it has created National Economic Council, a forum entrusted with the supply of economic information to the US President, and in 1996, the Economic Espionage Act was voted¹⁰, a document that strengthened the protection of business secrecy.

A report partly drawn up by American undergraduates at the request of C.I.A., „Japan 2000“, is the document that in 1991 proved that a major part of the “Japanese miracle” is based on an extremely efficient strategy for obtaining economic information. This document shows how, in only a few years, Japan became one of the first economic powers, in spite of the infrastructure destroyed in the Second World War. „Japan 2000” reveals the magic Japanese recipe based on the aggressive doctrine

⁹ See complete report at: <http://www.ie-news.com/fr/pdf/carayon.pdf>

¹⁰ See the document at: <http://www.economicespionage.com/EEA.html>

of collecting global economic information. Based on its conclusions, the report proposes the force strategy of the United Nations for future years: „The power acquired becomes the basic element for future instruments of coercion and control, whose efficiency depends on the rational use of force, of wealth and of knowledge, all these elements making up the structure of power. He countries which will be able to strategically use these three elements will obtain the greatest benefits if they alternate, in parallel, the promise of advantages and the threat of some constraints, exploiting technology of information to maximum effect”¹¹.

Since 1995, the US security strategy was based on three pillars: military, economic and cultural component¹². Joseph S. Nye, the dean of JFK School of Government from Harvard University reckoned in an article published in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine („America’s information edge” – no. 75 of 1996), that „the one country that can best lead the information revolution will be more powerful than any other”¹³. The US invests a great deal in the development of its own information capacities for the government and enterprises with economic information.

Immediately after the Second World War, the Japanese set up a unique economic data collection and processing system. A complex and highly effective measure whose central pillar was the Ministry of Foreign Industry and Commerce. With this ministry and with the help of efficient information techniques, the Japanese succeeded in filling the gap in other fields: ship and car building, computers, automation etc.

France started to lay a high weight on economic information since 1994, from the publishing of the report entitled “Intelligence économique et stratégie des entreprises”¹⁴. Specialists who drafted the report were asked to make a comparative analysis of the main national economic intelligence systems, taking into account the systems from Japan, USA, Germany, Italy, China, Russia etc. Furthermore, the report

¹¹ Ali Laidi, *Efectul de bumerang*, House of Guides, București, 2007, pag.104.

¹² <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nss/nss-95.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/51840/joseph-s-nye-jr-and-william-a-owens/americas-information-edge>

¹⁴ <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/074000410/index.shtml>

detects problems in the French information system and makes proposals in terms of the management of economic information in private companies.

Great Britain posits the information issue in the center of its economic strategy starting with 1998. This strategy is presented in a report entitled „Our competitive future: the knowledge economy“. The same finding, the same approach: changing the administration policies to help British companies¹⁵.

Germany succeeded in the '90s to make the junction between the interests of SME, of great companies and of lands/the state by repeated consultation sessions on information competitiveness topics. The German system, highly connected with the ORDO-liberal economic doctrine, is simple and efficient, being the result of private and state interests, rationalized by the doctrine mentioned.

China does not have an economic strategy as we understand it or as it is understood in the West. Nevertheless, Beijing represents the existence between worlds dominated by confrontations between the great powers, in particular in the economic field. In a paper drafted by two officers of the Chinese Army and published in France¹⁶, the authors speak about new wars, regrouped under the acronym MOOTW (Military

Operations Other Than War), subsuming commercial wars, financial wars, ecological wars etc. As early as the '90s, the Chinese government has been leading a policy based on information which mainly aims at controlling the technologies of the future. Even if they enjoy major strategic advantages – its culture with respect to patience, demography, etc., China struggles to recover from its dropping behind in the field of technology and science by relying on information obtained from all types of sources. It is well-known that only 48 hours elapse between the time of appearance of a new product that is announced to be successful, anywhere on the planet, and the moment when its cheap „made in China“ copy is released.

15 <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/competitiveness5/Past%20Indicators/UKPC1999.pdf>

16 Qiao Liang, Wang Xiangsui, *La Guerre hors limites*, Paris, Rivages, 2003

There are few countries that have chosen a powerful genuine strategy to overcome the challenge in terms of economic security. However, there are many countries that did not harmonize the positions of companies with the official ones at the level of state policy. Spain, Italy, Portugal do not have economic intelligence strategies, but strong companies from these states have complex competitive intelligence programs.

Eastern European countries, including Romania, do not have national programs and there are no major initiatives for aligning to the field practices of other economically developed countries. Internal political struggles in these countries do not allow the coagulation of a critical mass that channels resources for creating a real system for the growth of economic competitiveness. Moreover, economic errors made them easy targets to the economic intelligence of countries which realized what is the arsenal needed for conquering territories and people's minds nowadays.

The economic competitiveness from information point of view starts from the statement that the companies may develop valid competitive strategies based on the support represented by knowledge/information obtained by internal developing some specific capabilities (analyses, multiple estimations and assessments on alternative scenarios).

From this perspective, the platform supported by the competitive intelligence may develop a type of conception and approach of the competitiveness challenge, assertion supported by the fact that 80% of the big European companies carry out such programmes, and over 55% are assisted by some software applications in competitive intelligence, integrated in business intelligence systems and knowledge management.

What should be the role of the State and of the governmental environment in business environment?

The example of other European countries and not only, shows a few action lines, requiring debates and decision taken at a strategic level:

- opinion formation and awareness on the role of information in the economic processes;
- assisting during the creation of specific capabilities and education / training of specialists;
- development of cooperation platforms for economic fields;
- creation of a public-private strategic partnership in the information / knowledge management field;
- consultancy and assistance.

For example, by creating a hub, as a structure for coordination and as interface with the intelligence services and the economic environment, integrating the five potential responsibilities, the government can support the use of human resources having the expertise of information processing and evaluation. Running with the government assistance of such programs is based on an undisputed fact: almost all the Romanian companies lack the skills, abilities and resources necessary for the development of competitive intelligence activities and operations.

This reality must be understood as a vulnerability affecting the economic security, which is why the development of information capabilities in the business environment - focusing on the competitive intelligence area - must be turned into a priority for the national security strategy, so that Romania could meet its economic security policy objectives, and thus those of the national security policy.

With the perspective of an international trade almost duty-free in the future, starting from 2015-2020, the economic battle moves on the court of rules on the environmental protection, carbon emissions, nuclear risks, minimum guarantees for those who work, child labour, fisheries resources control, food security (genetically modified organisms, use of hormones, mad cow syndrome, avian flu, farmed salmon, etc.). All these problems are as many milestones through which current and future diplomacies must negotiate in order not to affect their own economies or to be affected as less as possible.

As we mentioned before, information is the means by which are achieved objectives in the economic competition. To be the best is not

enough to produce the best products at the best price, you must know very well the market and the competition, protecting at the same time, your strategic information. Global competition is ruthless and is becoming increasingly clear that in the current geo-economic system only the Orwellian type companies have a chance to win. Winners are always chosen from the most capable, those who manage to obtain information before the others.

Most sensitive areas in this battle - insurances, banks, audit, consulting - are the biggest consumers of strategic information. In a report prepared by the Institute of Advanced Studies of Homeland Security from France, it is shown that since 1995 the state government and companies have to monitor the agglutination process of the companies in the areas mentioned above. In a 2010 document from the European Commission¹⁷ - Audit Policy: lessons from the crisis - it is estimated that 90% of the audit market is divided between four big companies, the most important of which are in the U.S., followed by two British and one Dutch. The way these companies managed to grow is unusual in that each is in fact a conglomeration of smaller companies with common procedures and databases...

Economies of the Eastern Europe countries have gone through extensive restructuring processes all based largely on the feasibility studies, audits and analysis made by these prestigious companies. Mostly, these studies were paid from grants made available by countries from the Western Europe or by international financial bodies. Looking back on the economies of those countries, one can easily see who has used the economic information collected and processed on that occasion.

Lack of interest of several states for the economic security or the misunderstanding of the phrase contents may mean their location in the losers' camp, because, as in any war, there will be winners and losers of the economic war.

¹⁷ View the report at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/consultations/docs/2010/audit/green_paper_audit_ro.pdf

National security refers to the states' protection against external and internal threats at their national interests. Interests and threats are emphasized and defined differently by each state and there is no consensus on the nature or size of the threats that may cause (justify) security reactions¹⁸.

Watson Institute for International Studies offers a matrix of security¹⁹ ranking the risks for various potential secured entities, which are in order: individual, state, group of states (similar as values, common history, etc.), network (referring, essentially, to a group of countries that use common parts of the critical infrastructure) and the entire planet. It is interesting to note that the maximum level of danger for a state is not represented by war, terrorism, pandemic, conflict over resources or weapons of mass destruction, but the possibility of becoming a failed state. To be classified in this manner, the authors of the proposal are listing a number of conditions such as the population poverty, lack of economic stability, the inability to provide social or individual security, the proliferation of the organized crime, state delegitimizing (weakening the state capacity to implement the regulations, to collect taxes and to have the monopoly control over the violence), political and religious extremism, etc.

A state whose economy cannot support the prosperity of the population and the institutions meant to ensure the harmonization of social interests (defence, health, education, pensions, etc.) loses its reason to exist. After all, the citizens of a democratic state give up some of their income - through taxes - and a part of their freedom - through obedience to the law - to benefit from the state of services as better as possible. This is possible only if there is a strong economy, allowing the collection of taxes to a sufficient extent.

¹⁸ Paul Robinson, *Dictionary of International Security*, CA Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, page 202.

¹⁹ the interactive matrix is available at:
http://www.watsoninstitute.org/gs/Security_Matrix/

Conclusions

On state level, economic security entails the maximization of relative economic power of state considering that economic power is necessary and national power, including the military power, depends eventually on economic power. Economic security entails also the reduction of state vulnerability before external economic shocks as well as economic sanctions (...). Therefore, some specialists consider that insuring economic security is an essential component of the policy of national security.

If the key of economic security on state level is the position of state and of pending companies within the international networks of trade, production and finance, then the key on the level of economic system seems to be the stability of the entire system itself of market relations. This network includes a complicated interaction of contracts, credits, communications, transports etc.. When it operates, the average of actors prospers, existing, as well bankruptcies. When it doesn't operate, all actors in the system are affected, the classical example in this respect being the economic crisis of '30s. In part, this comparison refers to the levels of prosperity and fear to repeat the Great Crisis; however it reflects the high preoccupation opposite to the famous words of Frédéric Bastiat: „if goods cannot pass the borders, the soldiers will”.

When economic systems appear as objects of reference of security, the answer to the question „what is an essential threat?” may be given only in terms of principles on which are organized such systems. In the current geo-economic system, an entity similar to European Union may be existentially threatened by anything which may deviate from the rules and agreements which form its common market.

Although clear in principle, this criterion for security is not so simple in practice. At least two questions are raised:

- when is a threat so high to become a legitimate problem of security?

- how may someone face the systemic crises and their effects on the system units?

In the culture of high performance organizations, it is already implemented the idea that in order to be competitive, they shall anticipate correctly the changes inside a field of activity or the general context in which they operate. It is also known the fact that, in order to obtain such competitive advantage, one needs resources which may allow the transformation of data and information in products of intelligence – analyses, syntheses, assessments – on which may rely the process of taking decisions under conditions of low incertitude.

The project of turning the economy in one based on information and knowledge does not consist only in adopting these new instruments and concepts, but in creating/using an institutional frame enriched for the use of these, activities which may be materialized by structures such as virtual community of experts, decisional informational infrastructures and virtual community of information.

Facilitating the avoidance of surprise by premature warning and management of risks/opportunities generated by dynamics of business environment, practices and instruments indicated, allows the action on market, instead of reacting, as a player aware of game rules, of its own potential and of that of its competitors. Using these practices on governmental level is less probable that economy may be „surprised” by the external waives of crises with economic impact or of other kind. By a better understanding of what is happening on market and by a proper assessment of strategic/tactic impact of the actions supervised, the system supports the continuous calibration of competitive strategies and tactics for companies, economic branches and economy as a whole.

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