

New Wine in Old Wineskins?

Torn between Tech Trust and War Mistrust

Christoph Stückelberger¹, 5 March 2022

I attended the *MWC22 congress*, the global leading event for the ‘connectivity industry’ with mobile technologies. It took place in Barcelona, Spain from 28 Feb to 3 March with 60,000 participants, in person, from the whole world! - On 24 February, the war in Ukraine started.

Industries such as global mobile operators, manufacturers, technology providers, content owners and startups looked at “*intelligent connectivity*” as the main motto. They came from all continents, with a dominant presence from China, Europe and US – Russian companies were excluded. A stunning opulence of new trends in connecting people, sectors and organisations was presented. A few keywords and slogans from the exhibitors and discussion fora:

1. Technical Connectivity without Boundaries

Digital Smart Health Care; Superlink Solutions; Metaverse (Facebook) and Gigaverse (Huawei); Giga Green Site; Green Central Office; “One network. Any cloud. All software. Trust the Future” (Mavenir); “New Value Together” (Huawei); “Education Cloud Network” (Huawei); Hospital



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Digitalization; “Empower every person and organization on the planet to achieve more” (Microsoft), “Enabling a world where everyone and everything is intelligently connected” (Qualcomm); The Future of Urban Mobility with Drones for passengers; 5G Barman-Robot; Green Climate Targets (Deutsche Telecom); 5G Underwater Drones; From 5G to 6G; The Connected Classroom; “Smart Connectivity agriculture, drones, poles, surveillance and entertainment” (Intel); Planning Climate Smart and Wise Cities (book title, Springer); “Boost Agility with No-Code” (Quantel); “Smart Glasses to connect virtual and real world” (Vuzix and others); “5G^e New Future Connection without Boundaries”; “Lighting up the Connected Future. The Future is here” (Huawei, Foto above).

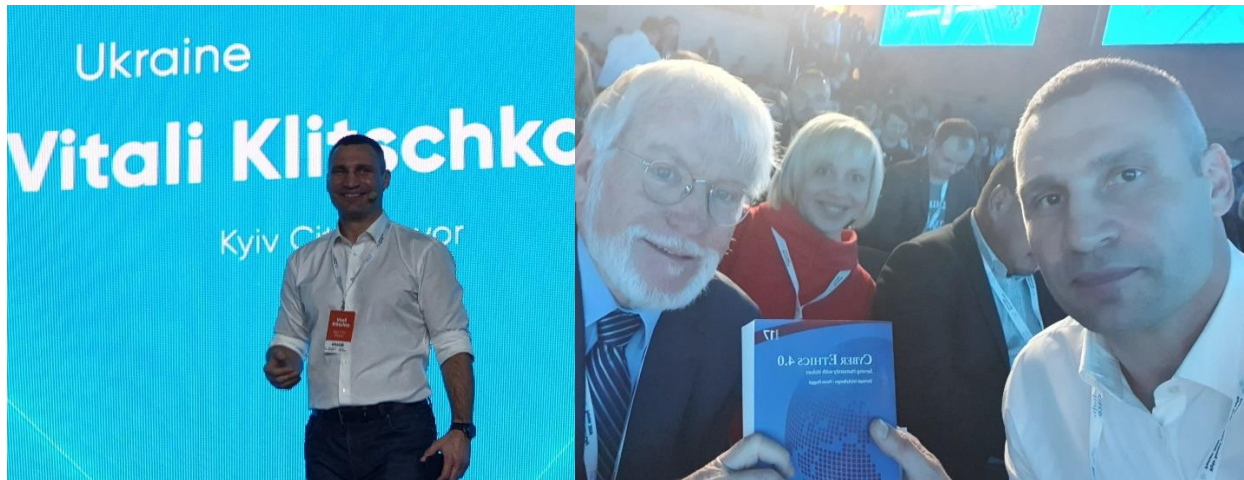
The event showcased the innovative energy, optimism and trust of the private sector in improving the world with technological innovation. The overall trend is *connectivity*, integrated systems connecting with digital means all devices, applications, software and institutions on any cloud and without borders.

2. Political Regulations with Boundaries

This goal of connectivity is promising for humankind and business. Hence, exhibitors and speakers tried to avoid political reflections and statements, knowing that the hot geopolitical situation with tensions between US and China and the hot war in Ukraine would separate instead of unite – build walls instead of connecting without borders. The reality is: “Tech moves much faster than governments.”² However, everybody also knows that technology needs regulatory frames. There was a ‘Ministerial Programme’ behind closed doors. Not only ministers of IT, but also of commerce, finance and education which are key players. It is not only technical standards that need to be regulated, but also the banks, the Fintech industry, the trade regimes, the educational standards, the internet regimes etc.

Ukraine and especially in its capital, Kyiv, has tried to speed up political frameworks based on technological progress. At the *Ukraine Smart City Forum 2019 in Kyiv*, I was a speaker on my book ‘Cyber Ethics 4.0’ promoting the integration of technological innovation, political framework, and ethical values. I then met Vitali Klitschko, the Kyiv City Mayor (photo below). He was a dynamic visionary with the plan of transforming Kyiv into the best Eastern European Smart City, fully digitized and connected in all public and private services – and now sees the destroyed city.

² Bruce Schneider, Regulating at the Pace of Tech. Tech moves much faster than Governments, in Transform, Feb 2022, Issue on Trust in Tech, published by Huawei, 3-10.



3. The Ukraine War with Mistrust

During the MWC22 world event, I checked hourly for news about the War in Ukraine. The suffering of the people in Ukraine and neighboring countries has already resulted in an immense stream of over 1.5 million refugees, a Russian population suffering from disconnection by the sanctions, a world economy in shaking troubles, and much more. The 2022 war photos look the same as in



World War II, 80 years back! An invasion against international law, with an information war of information manipulation and barriers on both sides as in every war. How is such an invasion possible in the 21st century? Because the destructive human, the “old Adam” is still the same.

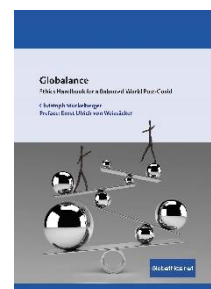
I call my Russian academic, open-minded friends in Russia in order to understand this aggression “from the other side”. I feel their deep frustration with three decades of promises made by Western countries – since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 – which, according to them, have been broken several times by Western countries. The Ukraine aggression is not a result of a short-term war trip or a crazy individual leader but a result of deep mistrust and lost imperial power and security, growing over decades, visible in Chechnia, Georgia, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Ukraine along with many more factors. However, this growing mistrust can in no way justify Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. On the contrary, it further increases mistrust. An escalation, militarily with

traditional weapons and nuclear threats, including from Nuclear Power Plants, and economically by disaster in world economy and supply chain disruptions, would drastically increase the number of victims. A de-escalation is much needed to avoid this outcome.

GSMA, the organizer of the Barcelona event and similar events in China, USA and more, provides the largest platform for mobile ecosystems with its commitment to connectivity. GSMA could not abstain from taking a position on the Ukraine war: “GSMA position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine: The GSMA strongly condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine. MWC is a unifying event with a vision to convene the mobile ecosystem to progress ways and means that connectivity can ensure people, industry, and society thrive ... The GSMA follows all government sanctions and policies resulting from this situation. There will be no Russian Pavilion at MWC22.”

4. New Wine in Old Wineskins? New Technologies with New Values: Globalance!

Two worlds clash in a very worrying way: The technological world is looking at connectivity, open borders, the future and mutual trust. The geopolitical world is looking at disconnection, sanctions, closed borders, past imperial glory, or Cold War strategies which result in fast growing mistrust. The good new wine of innovative technologies gets spoiled if it is poured in old wineskins of human mistrust, greed, power-struggles and power above rights. Innovative new technologies can only serve humanity if the humans, who develop and use them, become “new humans” with new values! Digital connectivity is great, if the will to be connected, and to cooperate is built on a win-win basis instead of unilateral domination, to solve common challenges of humanity like a pandemic and climate change instead of looking back by reviving old imperialistic, nationalistic, aristocratic or autocratic dreams. New economic value needs new ethical values! Technology is an important tool, a means, but not a goal in itself. The new values are more revolutionary than we may think. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was confronted with this, when he was teaching and living new values of peace and non-violence and challenged traditional rules and norms. He warned his friends. “No one puts new wine into old wineskins” (Mark 2:21). He pleaded for a human transformation. *A new global balance³ is needed!* We need to transform old (Russian) imperial dreams into connectivity, one-sided temptation of (Western) superiority into cooperation, religious messianic calling to save the world into humble contribution to save lives, and technocratic future-optimism into a holistic engagement for new technologies with new national and international regulations, human respect for each other and human dignity. ■



³ Christoph Stückelberger, *Globalance. Ethics Handbook for a Balanced World Post-Covid*, 600pp, Globethics.net, Geneva 2020. Download for free: <https://www.globethics.net/globalance>.