

**140**  
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## THE WORLD IN 2016: ten issues that will set the international agenda\*

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**V**ulnerability or – what comes to the same thing – reduced capacity to face risk, could be the buzzword in 2016. The global economic recovery will be *vulnerable*.

Those who heavily depend on high oil prices or on Chinese investment and demand will be *vulnerable*. Rights and liberties that we believed to be secure will be *vulnerable* to sacrifice in the name of security. And leaderships, alliances and regional integration processes will all be *vulnerable*.

The setting for all of this is a context of accelerating processes of change and contradictions between forces pushing in opposing directions. On the international agenda, certain macro-tendencies will also emerge with particular intensity, such as technology revolutions, urbanisation processes and changes in the redistribution of global and regional power. It will be a year in which inability to resolve multiple crises (refugees, European integration, emerging economies, among many others)

will go so far as to devalue the idea of crisis itself, becoming instead chronic phenomena or manifestations of long-term processes of change.

**In 2016 certain macro-tendencies will emerge with particular intensity, such as technology revolutions, urbanisation processes and changes in the redistribution of global and regional power.**

**Hydrocarbon exporters will lose global influence due to the decartelisation of the energy market and, at domestic level, the pressure to diversify their economies will increase.**

**The digitalisation and robotisation of the economy will accelerate in 2016 and will bring about a more intense debate on the future of work and education.**

**The entry into force of the TTIP will depend on the ambition of the new treaty as well as the size and course of the social mobilisation on both sides of the Atlantic.**

**The control of maritime routes and strategic global trade locations will acquire particular importance in 2016**

**In the fight against IS, diverse regional and global actors can start by abandoning maximalist positions in order to seek agreements that allow face to be saved and, eventually, reciprocal gestures to be made in other negotiation spaces**

**In 2016 the number of refugees and internally displaced persons will continue to break records. The reasons they flee are as unlikely to disappear as the conditions fit for their return are to be produced.**

Never forgetting the inevitable surprises that every year has in store (who, after all, could have predicted the scandal over Volkswagen diesel engine emissions or that Turkey would down a Russian fighter-bomber in 2015?), but attempting to foresee the circumstances and geographical areas of potentially greatest importance, we have selected ten issues that will give lots to talk about. And at the end of this document we set out some of the events of note in the calendar and those still awaiting a date.

### **1. Risk in the emerging markets**

The epicentre of the large economic crisis has been shifting. It began at the heart of the system, in the United States, but it was in Europe

and, specifically, in the countries on its southern periphery that it became most persistent. In 2016 other countries may have their turn, starting with the largest of them all, China. It is said that when elephants run, the other animals quake. If what we are witnessing is more than just a head cold, the consequences will spread beyond the Asian giant's borders.

On the one hand, this could deal a heavy blow to growing economies that depend on the Chinese market and its investments in large-scale infrastructure (many of which are developing countries and producers of primary materials). On the other, it could put a halt to US Federal Reserve plans to start putting an end to monetary expansion as, if not, they would push the Chinese economy and those of other emerging countries even closer towards an area of turbulence. And, finally, this possibility will raise doubts about the "Chinese model", until now a source of inspiration for many developing economies.

Another emerging market about which there will continue to be speculation is Brazil. In 2016 the country will remain in recession, the political attacks on Dilma Rousseff's presidency will continue, and so will the demonstrations of citizens' discontent, due to both corruption scandals and growing levels of unemployment. All of this in a special year for Brazil, because, with the summer Olympics being held in Rio de Janeiro, everything will be on global display.

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#### **2. Vulnerability due to low oil prices and those of other primary materials**

The downward pressure on oil prices will be maintained unless, at the ordinary meeting of OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, the producer countries act together to decide to reduce production. This scenario remains unlikely given that Saudi Arabia is prepared to lose out as long as its rivals incur greater losses. One such rival is Iran, which will take advantage of the end of international sanctions to put its crude production on the market. In addition, the issue here is not only one of supply, but also of demand. Especially if the deceleration (and in certain cases recession) in certain emerging countries is confirmed and if Europe, Japan and the United States show themselves unable to take up the baton of growth.

Among the countries that could be most affected are Russia, Venezuela and Nigeria. For these three, budgetary problems could exacerbate other challenges such as Western sanctions in the case of Moscow, political instability and institutional confrontation in Caracas, and the fight against Boko Haram for Abuja. All three merit special attention for the impact their destabilisation could have on their neighbours. Also, although their systemic impact may be lower, other petro-states such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Equatorial Guinea must not be overlooked. These countries have been characterised by iron political control built on the foundations of oil revenues and have not concerned themselves with addressing the inequalities in their respective countries. Lastly, low prices could raise

the tensions between the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government and Baghdad, complicating the situation in the Middle East a little more.

But it would be an error to focus attention only on the vulnerabilities caused by the fall in oil prices. Although it takes place over a longer period, the downward trend will also hit natural gas prices. One country that will be particularly affected is Algeria: it hasn't done its homework over recent decades either in terms of increasing production or diversifying its economy and what is more its president, who is seriously ill, has yet to name a successor.

In the field of natural gas, we will see how, through the increase in shale gas production and the proliferation of liquefaction and regasification facilities, it will be easier to diversify providers. The geopolitical impact in Europe will be notable to the extent that two providers in particular – Iran and the United States – enter the market, which should steadily diminish dependence on Russia.

The downward pressure could extend to other primary materials. The doubts about emerging countries and specifically China could have negative effects on the prices of other primary materials. This is already being felt, for example, with copper (a heavy but not lethal blow to Chile, the leading producer). In terms of agricultural products, the situa-

tion is a fair bit more complex. 2015 already brought a fall in prices, which, if prolonged will pose an additional problem to Brazil's

battered economy. The climatic conditions will need close observation: 2015's low prices were also due to abundant harvests, but some climatologists predict that the meteorological phenomenon known as "el Niño" could be especially harsh in 2016 and damage agricultural production, above all in Southeast Asia.

#### **3. Technological revolutions**

2016 will not be characterised so much by the appearance of new technologies as by the confirmation of the irreversibility of their impact on the distribution of power, on the economic model and even on legal and ethical issues. Four areas deserve particular attention.

Renewable energies will continue to grow. Production costs have fallen so sharply that renewables remain competitive even in a context of low hydrocarbon prices. The most significant challenge will be storage and its integration into the electricity grids. Tesla batteries for domestic use bursting onto the market and the advances in the autonomy of electric cars promise long-term changes with substantial geopolitical implications. Hydrocarbon exporters will lose global influence due to the decartelisation of the energy market and, at domestic level, the pressure to diversify their economies will increase. On the other hand, producers of scarce materials will be increasingly important, as will research in the field of batteries, one of the main beneficiaries of which will be Chile, the world's leading producer of lithium.

The digitalisation and robotisation of the economy will accelerate in 2016 and will bring about a more intense debate on the future of work and education. Will the jobs that today provide work for hundreds of millions of people still exist? Which new occupations will appear? Will professional retraining be possible and, if not, how will the risks of social exclusion be dealt with? Are we moving towards a more tertiarised, precarious economy, with greater weight for personal services in the labour market? How will the education system, including professional training, adapt to these transformations? While these debates go on between experts and economic and social actors, thousands of entrepreneurs will continue to open up new ways of doing business, especially in the field of the collaborative economy. These advances will also present new security challenges to the extent that terrorist groups and criminal networks will take advantage of the blind spots in the digital economy.

In 2016, it will be 15 years since the creation of Wikipedia and ten since the first tweet: reflection on how we communicate and inform ourselves is inevitable. As it is on the attempts to control and censor information flows, on the limits of freedom of expression and on the recovery of “vintage” forms of information, communication and activism.

Lastly, the advances in terms of artificial intelligence and robotisation will generate legal and ethical problems similar to those that have been raised by drones. The mobilisation of the scientific community, the leadership of activists such as Jody Williams (who launched the international campaign for the prohibition of landmines and won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize) and the growing press coverage of the phenomenon will raise social awareness about the risks of research into autonomous weapon systems, popularly called “killer robots”.

#### **4. Eroded blocs and volatile alliances**

An EU beset by internal problems will have greater problems projecting itself globally. 2016 will be characterised by four significant challenges: the economic recovery, the arrival and integration of refugees, the United Kingdom’s referendum on remaining in the EU (with no agreed date, but which may be held midway through the year) and the tilt towards populist and extreme right policies in the governments of central Europe. In this sense, attention will have to be paid to the decisions of the Polish government as, just as in the case of Hungary, they could give a body blow to European values and principles.

In 2016 it will also be evident that the BRICS are neither a solid bloc (were they ever?) nor an alternative to global financial governance. Among them, India will be the country courted by all. For two reasons: unlike other emerging powers, its growth prospects are favourable; and it is capable of leaning either towards the United States or its powerful neighbours to the north.

In this context of eroded blocs, alliances will be increasingly unidimensional (articulated around a specific issue) and will, therefore, seem volatile and even contradictory. The Middle East will provide the clearest example of this. Although it remains tempting to simplify this puzzle by alluding to a face-off between a Sunni bloc led by Saudi Arabia and a Shia bloc led by Iran, there are many occasions on which it has been shown that these blocs are neither homogeneous nor are they moved by merely sectarian concerns. For years, it has been clear that supposed allies on one issue (the Syrian conflict, for example) find themselves in opposing camps on others (the Muslim Brotherhood, or the Arab-Israeli conflict). Another of the trends that will be accentuated this year is the declining confidence the EU and US have in their traditional allies (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey); both will look with growing interest on the role Iran may play.

The Bolivarian bloc will continue to be weakened in Latin America. The tension in the institutions and streets of Venezuela will be high and we will have to pay attention to how the elections in Nicaragua on November 6th play out. Ecuador will maintain a pragmatic policy and the normalisation of relations between Cuba and Washington will continue. This will take place within the context of the continent’s shift to the right (the key element of which in 2016 may be the elections in Peru) and the internal difficulties in

### **Russia, Venezuela and Nigeria merit special attention for the impact their destabilisation could have on their neighbours.**

the countries with the means or desire to exercise leadership, especially Brazil.

In contrast to the tendency of blocs towards decomposition and volatile alliances, we will see how transatlantic and trans-Pacific relations inherited from the cold war remain in relatively good health. Their agendas will combine questions of security (North Korea, Ukraine) and trade liberalisation. In the last phase of the Obama administration the tempo of the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) negotiations will be stepped up. Its entry into force will depend on the ambition of the new treaty as well as the size and course of the social mobilisation on both sides of the Atlantic.

#### **5. Maritime geopolitics**

The control of maritime routes and strategic global trade locations will acquire particular importance in 2016 above all in five particular spaces. The first is Central America where the widening of the Panama Canal to allow the passage of vessels with greater load-carrying capacity will be inaugurated. But this will also be a year of speculation on the viability of the alternative route that China has been pushing for in Nicaragua.

The second is the Middle East. Terrorist groups and organised crime networks will continue to operate in the Sinai Peninsula and emerge as a threat to security in both Egypt and

the wider world, due to the region's proximity to the Suez Canal. The Bab el-Mendeb Strait will also attract interest due to their proximity to the conflict in Yemen but, above all, due to China's plans to secure its presence in this area with a military base in Djibuti. Lastly, the Strait of Hormuz, a key part of the oil and liquefied natural gas trades, appears to be one of the areas at risk if tensions between Saudis and Iranians escalate.

The third is the eastern Mediterranean. Above all if an agreement is reached to resolve the conflict over Cyprus, thereby opening up new opportunities to exploit natural gas deposits. Hopes are higher than ever for two reasons: on the one hand, because of the presidents' (Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci) capacities for dialogue and genuine desires to reach an agreement, and on the other because of the greater interest shown by Turkey in the same. Turkey has been accumulating too many foreign policy failures recently and this agreement would also give a boost to its accession negotiations with the EU.

The fourth is the Arctic. An assertive Russia and the evidence of climate change (2016 could be a record year in the decline of the frozen surface of the Arctic) will continue to raise interest in the control of this space in terms of trade routes, exploitation of seabed resources and conventional security issues.

Lastly, and no less important, in East Asia we must be attentive to the consequences of the North Korean challenge

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and the defensive reactions that it could provoke among its neighbours in South Korea and Japan. In terms of the maritime disputes in East Asia, Beijing's claims in the South China Sea will continue to be a high risk factor. In Southeast Asia, the Philippines will take on particular importance as it holds crucial elections in May and is one of the countries that views Chinese manoeuvres with greatest concern. Tensions between Taipei and Beijing could also intensify following the Taiwanese elections in January.

In a world in which maritime geopolitics are of ever greater importance, the attraction of large port cities will also grow, especially if they are able to connect to global networks and use them to attract investment beyond the logistics sector.

### 6. Sustainable and resilient cities

We live in a world that is increasingly populous (7.4 billion people) and urban (54%), trends that, according to the United Nations, show few signs of reversing. For 2030 a population of 8.5 billion is predicted, with 60% living in cities. The rural exodus will pick up speed, especially in the emerging economies and in countries where global warming is already evident. What is more, the understanding of what is and is not an urban area will change with the consolidation and univer-

salisation of the metropolitan phenomenon. A number of the problems and challenges faced by cities transcend municipal politics, which makes new forms of metropolitan government necessary.

One of 2016's most important events is the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). This year the forum is meeting in the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, and will face the challenge of translating the Sustainable Development Goals and the conclusions of the Paris climate agreement into urban policies. Cities will fight to be recognised not only as issues for consideration in sustainable development but as actors and indispensable partners. They will do so out of their own desire but also in response to citizen pressure as the effects of global warming and pollution mobilise the residents of urban centres, demanding solutions that do not always lie in local government hands.

The rapid and often disorderly growth of urban areas is increasing their vulnerability to large-scale natural disasters. Unfortunately, it is easy to predict that 2016 will provide opportunities to witness this in the form of earthquakes and floods, putting the need to increase cities' resilience on the table. In addition, the agenda is likely to be broadened to approach the ways cities face different types of emergency and crisis. For example, how to accommodate a massive influx of refugees, how to reduce growing levels of inequality, how to overcome the terrorist threat, how to tackle pandemics and how to fight organised crime.

In a context in which cities concentrate population, wealth and power, their political representatives will have growing influence. The capacity to act in a coordinated manner will be essential in order to influence state policies and perhaps even shape the international agenda.

### 7. Obama's legacy and the new US administration

US citizens have a date with the ballot boxes on November 8th 2016 and the rest of the world will continue feeling that the result will affect them greatly. This year an assessment will be made of Obama's legacy on issues such as migration policy, the thawing of relations with Cuba, the commitment to fighting climate change and the diplomatic gamble on the Iranian nuclear programme. In the last leg of his presidency Obama is likely to redouble his efforts to toughen up the requirements for the possession of guns. Nevertheless, his legacy will be incomplete if he fails to fulfil one of the promises made when he became president: to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

Although Bernie Sanders has been making up ground, at the start of the year all bets suggest that Hillary Clinton is best placed to win both the primaries for the Democratic nomination and the presidential election. Just as Obama's election intensified the debate on the role of the African-American population, Clinton's will bring about discussion on the pos-

sible impact of having a woman at the helm of the world's leading power. Talk will also centre on the role of dynasties in US politics and the level of continuity or change with regard to the Obama administration.

The election of the Republican candidate will be marked by the controversial profile of the favourite in the polls, Donald Trump, a property magnate who has made himself world famous with his Islamophobic discourse, his refusal to take in refugees and his promise of a firm hand on immigration. Whether he wins or not, his rise is indicative of a process of frustration and radicalisation in parts of US society and thought must be given to how international balances would change if a person of his profile occupied the Oval Office. A collateral effect of Trump's rise is that he makes his main rivals, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, look moderate despite their hard-line postures on issues such as climate change denial, the freedom to carry arms and foreign policy.

Some Democrats cherish the idea of Trump as a rival, arguing that it would mobilise their bases. As a warning, it is worth recalling that, despite some clear differences, Reagan's nomination in 1980 aroused similar feelings and yet he ended up winning the election. The nomination of Cruz or Rubio would leave us with a closer-fought election and good reasons to observe the role of the Latino vote in a United States that is undergoing profound demographic change.

### **8. Failed states, ungoverned spaces and global terrorism**

These are not new phenomena, but 2016 is likely to bring new editions of their threats to global security. The fragility, collapse or ineffectiveness of state structures coupled with the strengthening of armed groups (militias, insurgent groups, organised crime networks) at times produces security vacuums and at others raises a challenge to the institutions of the global and regional security order. At this moment, such areas exist in large parts of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, the Sinai Peninsula, in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In 2016 these areas will be a focus of global instability both as operational bases for increasingly interconnected terrorist groups and breeding grounds for all types of criminal activity. The three groups with greatest destructive capacity are the Taliban, Boko Haram and Islamic State (IS), also known as Daesh or ISIS. The various international coalitions fighting this last group will only achieve their objective by acting in coordination, if they use instruments that go beyond the merely military and, even more importantly, if they have local ground support. We believe that these conditions will only be achieved in part and, therefore, though we foresee IS losing territory and popularity it is hard to envisage its complete disappearance from the scene of conflict.

Clearly, what happens with IS will depend on whether the attempts to find a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria are successful. We believe that there will be an intensification of diplomatic efforts in a context characterised by conflict fa-

ctive: diverse regional and global actors can start by dropping their maximalist positions in order to seek agreements that allow face to be saved and, eventually, reciprocal gestures to be made in other negotiation spaces. A sign that agreement may close would be Moscow and Tehran letting it be known that Assad cannot or should not lead the future of the country. Nevertheless, two elements could end up closing this window of opportunity: if, ultimately, the rivalry between regional powers (especially between Iran and Saudi Arabia) ends up being more important, or if local actors show greater autonomy and follow patterns based on interest calculations that differ from those of their foreign backers.

Relatively disconnected from what is happening in Syria and Iraq, terrorists linked more or less explicitly with IS will pursue their campaign of projecting terror on a global scale. And in the Sahel and the Maghreb we will observe how these "new expressions of terrorism" compete with other groups still acting under the umbrella and methodology of Al-Qaeda.

### **9. Refugees in a fortified world**

In 2016 the number of refugees and internally displaced persons will continue to break records. The reasons they flee are as unlikely to disappear as the conditions fit for their return are to be produced. Similarly, there will be little change in the

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countries either of origin or destination. The Middle East, the Lake Chad area, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Myanmar will be the places millions of people flee. They will find refuge, principally, in a ring of neighbouring countries, but a greater number will begin longer and more dangerous journeys. There will, thus, be more pressure on the European continent as well as on Australia.

The impossibility of return, in particular, added to the scarce resources of the United Nations' specialised agencies will increase the pressure at local level on how to integrate this population into the labour market, the education system and society as a whole. Lebanon is one of the most vulnerable countries to this pressure because of the extremely high number of refugees it takes in, because of the limited size of its territory and the complex balances between communities.

Refugees will remain one of the main issues on the European agenda and the collective failure to handle the crisis will continue to be demonstrated. If, in 2015, the debate centred on how to deal with a humanitarian crisis, in 2016 the question of the integration of the refugees into host societies will gain weight. Xenophobic movements will adapt their discourse of fear to this new reality: not only will they talk of an invasion but they will present the refugees as an enemy within, a kind of Trojan horse. Chancellor Merkel, who at the start of this crisis positioned herself as favouring an open arms policy, will be subject to growing numbers of questions from mem-

bers of her own party. A poor result in the regional elections this year will reveal tensions over her succession and could harden the reception policies.

The member states and European institutions will have no option other than to recognise that the current system of distributing refugees and the asylum policy (the Dublin system) do not and will not work. But this confirmation and any modifications that result will not bring about fairer and more efficient mechanisms. In parallel, efforts to strengthen the EU's external borders will be redoubled along with those to initiate more collaboration with Turkey and the countries of origin and transit.

## 10. Securocracies

The concept of a "securocracy" can be used in two senses. The first indicates that elements linked to the security forces (army, police, intelligence services) hold power, sometime through informal channels. The second refers to the invocation of security as a means of legitimating power and as an absolute priority for the government's activity. It is this second sense that will take shape in 2016, and be translated into the perpetuation of exceptional measures (deployment of the army in the street, re-establishment of border controls where there were none and curfews, among others).

## Cities will fight to be recognised not only as issues for consideration in sustainable development but as actors and indispensable partners.

As a result, rights that we thought well-established will be questioned. For example, in France the debate on the right to nationality will intensify. In Turkey further limitations will be placed on freedom of expression and demonstration in a climate of growing violence due to terrorist surge and fighting in urban areas between the state security forces and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). In the EU further restrictions will be placed on the free movement of people. Globally, the terrorist threat will be the best excuse for introducing new mechanisms of control of the people, although they may in fact have other motivations. China offers a clear example of this with the implementation of the recently adopted anti-terrorist law.

With a population that demands security and some states prepared to provide it, the politics of fear will dominate in both democratic systems and authoritarian regimes. Many leaders will invoke de Gaulle's famous phrase "it's me or chaos". This year it is worth paying particular attention to Africa. Various African presidents will show their desire to remain in power in 2016. The first will be the Ugandan, Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, who will seek a new mandate in February's elections.

The debate on security in Latin America will continue. Across the whole continent, but especially in Mexico, Central

America and Venezuela, society will demand reductions in the extremely high levels of citizen insecurity, the impunity of organised crime and the inefficiency or bias in the justice system. And, to end on an optimistic note, 2016 should be the year that will put an end to decades of conflict in Colombia. The peace process has reached a tipping point, which will present new challenges to Colombian society and government in terms of security, such as demobilisation, disarmament and the reintegration of fighters.

## 25 dates that can already be marked on the calendar...

16th January:	<b>General elections in Taiwan.</b> Could put an end to a period of detente between Taipei and Beijing. This will be the preamble to other elections in Asia, such as those in the Philippines (May) and Hong Kong (September).
January 20th-23rd:	<b>World Economic Forum.</b> Like every year, the Swiss municipality of Davos is the meeting point for political and economic leaders to get together and speak of global risks and challenges as well as to see each other and to be seen.
January 24th-31st:	<b>African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.</b> Around the edges of the summit, African civil society organisations are sure to make their voices heard as the organisation has declared 2016 to be the year of human rights.
February 12th-14th:	<b>Munich Security Conference.</b> An essential date reaching its 52nd edition. As important as the public agenda will be the meetings held between participants at the margins of the conference.
February 26th:	<b>Legislative elections in Iran.</b> Although regime hardliners will put many obstacles, these elections may confirm the popular support for the moderate line. The results will condition Iranian politics in the long term, as the Assembly of Experts, whose mandate is eight years, chooses the supreme leader.
March 13th:	<b>Regional elections in Germany</b> in three länder, among them Baden-Württemberg. Will Merkel pay the price for her open arms policy towards migrants? If so, an internal debate will begin on her succession.
March 17th:	<b>Fifth anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1973</b> giving legal authorisation to the international intervention in Libya. This would be a good occasion to identify why it failed to establish peace and reflect on the validity and application of the concept of the responsibility to protect.
March 23rd:	<b>Deadline for a peace agreement in Colombia.</b> Set by the Colombian government and the head of the FARC's secretariat (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in the conversations in Havana. Everything suggests the peace process is irreversible.
April 3rd:	<b>Elections in Ireland.</b> The most likely date, though they have yet to be formally called. After Greece, Portugal and Spain, those for and against the austerity policies will be judged at the ballot boxes.
April 10th:	<b>Elections in Peru.</b> Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the controversial president of Japanese origin, leads the polls. Her victory would confirm the Latin American shift to the right but she will probably need a second round on June 5th.
April 22nd:	<b>Ceremony of signing of the agreement against climate change.</b> On "Mother Earth Day", Ban Ki-moon is gathering world leaders to sign the agreement reached to slow global warming. The period for signing the agreement will remain open until April 17th 2017 and it will come into force when 55 countries that represent 55% of global emissions have signed it.
May 5th:	<b>Elections in Scotland.</b> A test of the strength of the independence movement, nearly two years after the referendum. Scots will judge whether London has fulfilled the promises with which, in the end, it achieved victory for the choice to remain part of the United Kingdom, as well as whether the SNP vote (Scottish National Party) remains the best way of channelling discontent with conservative politics.
June 2nd:	<b>OPEC Meeting.</b> It is likely that the oil exporters will continue to be divided between those who want to maintain production levels despite that meaning continued low prices and those for whom the situation could pose an existential threat.
June 8th-10th:	<b>Summit of the Americas.</b> Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, will host a summit that will show the new balances in hemispheric relations and the impact of the political changes in various capitals in the Americas.
June 23rd-24th:	<b>European Council.</b> We will learn the content of the new EU global strategy as well as the level of ownership European leaders are prepared to take of it.
August 9th-14th:	<b>World Social Forum, Montreal.</b> Fifteen years since the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre hosted the first of what is sometimes called the Davos of the alternative movements. For the first time it is taking place in a city of the "North".
August 5th-21st:	<b>Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games.</b> This will give global exposure to the contradictions of the Brazilian growth model as well as the political problems faced by President Dilma Rousseff. Russian athletes will be unable to participate for doping reasons. And, most probably, requests to respect the immemorial Olympic truce will be ignored in various conflict scenarios.
September 4th-5th:	<b>G20 summit in Hangzhou.</b> For the first time the group that brings together the world's leading economies will gather in China. The slow-down of the emerging economies, the impacts of falling oil prices and monetary policy will figure in the discussions and the media coverage of the summit.
September 13th-26th:	<b>71st Session of the UN General Assembly.</b> Showcase for world leaders. Attention will be given to the last speech made by Barack Obama, who began his presidency promising multilateralism. This is also Ban Ki-moon's last year as Secretary General. His successor will be chosen in 2016.
September 18th:	<b>Legislative elections in Russia.</b> Rather than the result (the victory of United Russia is assured) interest lies in how the elections unfold (how much expression of dissent the Kremlin allows).
October 17th-20th:	<b>Habitat III.</b> Quito will host the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. A forum that meets every 20 years and whose agenda will take the Sustainable Development Goals and the conclusions of the Paris climate agreement to the local level.
November 6th:	<b>Elections in Nicaragua.</b> Elections that will be marked by polarisation if, as all predict, Daniel Ortega stands again and the opposition, following the Venezuelan example, appears to be united.
November 8th:	<b>US presidential elections.</b> Will they change the direction of US foreign and migration policy? Two of the questions that the campaign will centre on and two strong reasons why the whole world will have its eyes on Washington.
November 27th:	<b>Presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo.</b> Joseph Kabila seeking a new mandate could provoke instability, especially in the east of the country.
December 31st:	<b>25th anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.</b> A good time to reflect on the way Russia relates to its neighbours and on the frozen conflicts in the former Soviet space (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and Ossetia, among others).

## ...and 10 more with dates still to be confirmed

<b>British referendum on membership of the EU:</b>	Although Cameron gave himself margin until the end of 2017, it seems likely that the British will be called to decide on their country's place in relation to the EU mid-way through 2016.
<b>Peace agreement in Cyprus:</b>	Perhaps including this in the list is over-optimistic. But never before has the end of a conflict that has lasted over forty years seemed so close.
<b>Extraordinary European Council on refugees or migration policy:</b>	It might be called after a great tragedy, after an increase in arrivals to European coasts or just when the realisation hits that the redistribution plans are a resounding failure and the asylum system has been overtaken by circumstance.
<b>Close of TTIP negotiations:</b>	This is the margin the US and EU have given themselves. Social movements will oppose it, but the desire to take advantage of the last year of Obama's mandate counts in its favour.
<b>International conference on peace in Syria:</b>	the Geneva talks continue to focus on who should be at the table. In 2016, will we see diplomatic efforts to speak of what and how and not just who?
<b>Arab League Summit in Morocco:</b>	As decided in March 2015, although a date has still to be set. It will probably be an occasion on which Saudi Arabia tries to project its regional leadership. Morocco is a staunch ally of the Saudis.
<b>Regional and local elections in Tunisia:</b>	Five years after the fall of Ben Ali, Tunisians have not yet been able to elect their mayors. Doing so is essential to consolidating the fragile democratic transition.
<b>Opening of the Panama Canal:</b>	planned for April, but still without an official date. It will give greater visibility to the strategic importance of the large maritime flows and there will be speculation about the viability of alternative routes.
<b>Impeachment of Dilma Rousseff:</b>	With three fronts open in the congress, the electoral court and public opinion, the president of Brazil has thus far managed to preserve the alliances that allow her to remain at the head of the government, but they are volatile. The Olympic Games could win her a truce but, afterwards, the calculations of the largest member of the governmental coalition, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), could change.
<b>Closing Guantanamo Bay:</b>	Obama promised to do this during his first year in the White House and has reiterated that the prison is expensive and inefficient. Will he fulfil his promise seven years on or leave the hot potato in the hands of his successor? Will he make a historic visit to the island?