SPECIAL ISSUE: Reflections on Developments in the Year 2020: A Critical Assessment

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF 2020
Time to revisit our value system, norms and priorities

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The COVID-19 pandemic, which is not over yet, has created a devastating impact on the socioeconomic and health infrastructures of most, if not all, countries. In addition to the deceased persons, it has also affected the lives of millions of people in multiple ways. The crisis entails drastic disruption of economic activity; indeed, this has been the deepest recession since the end of World War II. It is essential to also note that the pandemic has reminded us that societies and their foundations can be fragile.

Undoubtedly, the technological achievements of the last few decades have been remarkable and, not surprisingly, created the illusion of untouchability. Yet COVID-19 reminded us that this may not always be the case. Likewise, we cannot take things for granted. And it remains to be seen how the pandemic will finish and how the new normality will be.

During this difficult period of disruption, technology has proved indispensable to maintain economic activity, communications and also distance learning. But this has its limits; indeed, in most activities human interaction via physical presence cannot be substituted.

In the era of globalization and while most theories assumed that the nation-state and its role were not of primary importance anymore, perspectives changed. It was the nation-state that has been playing the most important role in addressing this unique crisis. It seems that both in theory and practice the nation-state comes back as the most important player in the international environment. It may not be an exaggeration to say that this has always been the case; the pandemic and how it is being handled enabled more people to realize it.

The EU, like the US and other major players, were caught unprepared by COVID 19. The major issue though has been the handling of the crisis. Obviously, this is a unique situation. And not surprisingly and unlike the previous Euro-debt crisis a few years earlier, several leaders, technocrats, academics, journalists and other personalities called for a European Marshall Plan. The EU pursued an expansionary monetary policy and also suspended the tight fiscal rules requiring balanced budgets. It also initiated special

targeted programs to address the crisis. But it refrained from taking additional bold steps which would have entailed a paradigm shift. The Eurozone could, for example, have initiated a radical policy of money creation and grants to member states in order to help them address the crisis more effectively. It did not take this extra step though, reflecting the conservative position of Germany and other similar minded forces. It is worthwhile noting though that in the Eurogroup meeting on April 9, 2019, it was acknowledged that the way the Euro-debt crisis was dealt with "was not adequate". Furthermore, the issue of solidarity as a value of the EU, in theory and practice, has been raised. The conservative forces indicate that solidarity in the EU is a reality. The alternative view is that what has been done so far is not enough.

A major issue has been the testing of the Neoliberal Model II and the established orthodoxy in the EU, especially in the Eurozone. I label it Neoliberal Model II in order to distinguish it from what I describe as the Neoliberal Model I which was theoretically introduced in the late 1960's and was politically pursued in several countries subsequently. Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and to a lesser extent Helmut Kohl were associated with it. The Neoliberal Model I had much support from the middle classes in several countries; its major pillars included containing unnecessary regulation and public spending, reducing taxes and providing incentives at various levels so as to increase labour supply, investment and innovation. The Neoliberal Model II, mostly associated with Angela Merkel, focused on balanced budgets, even more limited public intervention in the economy, much less public spending and greater reliance on the market forces. The outcome has been increased inequality, the enhancement of poverty, the reduction of the middle classes and higher unemployment. For the first time in many decades the standard of living of the younger generations may be lower than that of their fathers and grandfathers.

The COVID 19 crisis has shown beyond any doubt that the state and its role are indispensable; and that markets have their limitations. We should recall that the obsession with balanced budgets even in times of deep recessions during the previous crisis had led to serious reductions in public spending in various sectors including health. And when COVID 19 arrived this had a serious toll.

The record in relation to the Euro-debt crisis and the COVID 19 pandemic points to the need for a new paradigm. Certainly, the market forces are important but at the same time we should acknowledge that some lessons from Keynesian and Neo-Keynesian Economics are still valid and relevant. Moreover, perhaps the COVID 19 crisis should provide the opportunity to revisit our value system, norms and priorities.

It would be an omission not to refer to the adventurous and revisionist policies of Turkey which inevitably constitute a threat to stability, cooperation and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean, the broader Middle East and Central Asia.

To the present day the excesses of Turkey did not have any cost for Ankara. It remains to be seen how this will eventually end. History indicates that appeasement and ignoring excesses do not guarantee peace, stability and security.

Last but not least, the outcome of the US presidential elections on November 3, 2020 has implications not only for Americans but for the world as a whole. President Biden will attempt to redefine the US socioeconomic model while at the same time he, unlike his predecessor, is expected to adopt a multilateral approach in international affairs. It remains to be seen how the US under Biden will influence international politics and the day after.

THE CORONAVIRUS TEST OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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The year 2020 left us with the devastating results of the coronavirus pandemic. To date, the main question that gnaws at the minds of politicians, businessmen and academics is whether the international community will be able to overcome the COVID-19 destruction and move further towards a better world or it is doomed to come to terms with the so-called new normal, which is essentially not normal at all. However, this question only creates a general context within which more concrete problems and challenges exist.

Between the past and the future
Many lives and jobs have been lost. The pandemic has radically changed the everyday life of people. It has changed the format of international cooperation beginning with online summits at the highest level and ending the cancellation or postponement of important events. Thus it was decided to postpone the 2020 NPT Review Conference and hold it no later than April 2021. Russia and the United States have suspended inspections under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-3). Academic conferences and symposia have gone to remote access.

The coronavirus has strongly hit the global economy. Meanwhile, forecasts for assessing economic prospects vary greatly. Politicians are generally more optimistic than economists. IMF predicts a 4.9 percent contraction instead of its previously forecast 3 percent drop, underscoring the scale of the task facing policymakers. The pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the countries that live off tourism and travel related industries. Another of the consequences of the pandemic is the widespread obsession with economic security. In a globalized economy where everything is related to everything else, risks are manifold, including supply chain disruptions, shrinking markets, and undermining industrial and technological bases. It seems that re-shoring will become an alternative to hyper globalization, which, however, is good for the circular economy and, consequently, the planet's "green future". However, the future of the post-COVID economy will depend on finding the right balance between the national interests of states and the imperative for multilateral cooperation. Among the positive consequences of the pandemic, which must still be lived up to, many call the massive spread of digital technologies and the emergence of new professions, in particular, anti-crisis managers.

The Coronavirus catalyst of old trends

At the level of "high politics", the pandemic became not so much a turning point or a game changer but rather a catalyst for trends that existed before. First, it did not contribute to the solidarity of the United States, the European Union, China and Russia in the face of the common enemy. The international rivalry has affected even the healthcare sector where national vaccine competition has reached unprecedented proportions, not to mention the relationship between the world's centers of power. Almost immediately after the outbreak of the pandemic, it became clear that Russia and the West would not be able to unite against the deadly virus. This would have required resolving numerous contradictions over the sanctions wars, the Crimea problem, the situation in Donbas, the causes of the arms control crisis, and etc. Moreover, the pandemic was used by the parties to incite political and ideological confrontation. The latest G-20 Summit, full of fair appeals and good wishes, did not bring the participants' positions closer.

Second, the pandemic has not cemented the rift in Euro-Atlantic relations. On the contrary, President Trump did everything he could to make the Europeans turn away from him. One must recognize that the coronavirus did what the American Democrats could not do during the entire presidency of Donald Trump - to make him leave. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the COVID-19 provided Joe Biden's victory. And this in itself leaves Europeans, as well as liberals in the United States, with a bitter aftertaste: what would have happened if not for the pandemic? And can European allies rely on the country where Trumpism remains a powerful political force? Of course, Biden will change the tone and the form of American foreign policy and in diplomacy such things matter. Surely, it will be easier and more pleasant for Europeans to talk to Biden, and, most likely, the new president will try to replace Trump's "exit strategy" from the international agreements with "a return strategy". However, even in the best-case scenario of Euro-Atlantic relations, Europe will continue to be seen in Washington as a tool for achieving US goals. Neither Biden nor anyone else will change the EU's drive for strategic autonomy.

Third, COVID-19 was a moment of truth for European Union. The pandemic has given a new impetus to the integration processes. After the first disappointing reaction of the EU leadership to the spread of the pandemic in Europe, the European Union managed to group up and present an Action plan aimed at eliminating the devastating consequences of the deadly virus. Not without difficulties the EU member-states came to the agreement on the seven-year budget from which assistance would be allocated to the most affected countries. It is important to note that in developing their anti-coronavirus policy, the EU leaders did not step back from the ambitious goals set by the European Commission (single healthcare market, single digital market, "Green pact", etc.). However, EU is still faced with numerous internal and external challenges, first and foremost with the crisis of liberal democracy, that have not been resolved in a more relaxed situation.

Fourth, the COVID-19 has exacerbated tensions between the United States and China, (although these tensions existed in a blurred form even before the pandemic), and dealt a blow to their global positions. The pandemic has shattered fundamental perceptions of American exceptionalism - the distinctive role that the United States played as a world leader in the decades after World War II. Many experts predict a rise in social tensions in China, since the state capitalism that lies at the heart of the country's current strength will be unable to create durable and inclusive welfare, which is the basis for building an innovative economy in the digital age.

Fifth, the pandemic has encouraged activism of regional hegemons. It has pushed Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's towards expansionism in order to divert the attention of the Turkish citizens from his inability to improve economic situation and to effectively cope with the pandemic. He turned the fundamental principle of Ataturk's foreign policy "peace at home, peace in the world" as well as the AKP slogan "no problems with neighbours", into its opposite – aggressive expansionism in Turkey's neighbourhood. Erdogan's "activism" has many faces beginning with Turkey's military intervention on the ground in the conflict prone areas in the Middle East and CIS (Nagorno-Karabakh) and ending with his expansion into the waters of the eastern Mediterranean that resulted in new disputes with Greece and Cyprus over the hydrocarbon-rich Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and brought about negative reaction of European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Alliance (NATO).

In fact, at the height of the pandemic, Erdogan provoked a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh, spurring President Aliyev of Azerbaijan to start military operations against Armenian troops in this disputed territory. Unleashing the conflict, Erdogun wanted to stake out Turkey's role as a regional great power, whose interests no one can ignore. Turkey's geopolitical success according to Erdogan's grand design was to reconcile the population with the current difficulties.

The question for tomorrow
With the spread of the pandemic of the two eternal Russian questions - "who is to blame?" and "what to do?" the second one came to the fore. What to do in order to cope with the devastating impact of the coronavirus? Nevertheless, when, figuratively speaking, the post-COVID dust settles down, the second question will arise – "who is to blame?".

Why did the world learn about the COVID-19 so late, if according to some evidence, the first cases of the deadly virus were registered as early as September 2019? Why was the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan officially recognized only on December 31, 2019, if the first case of coronavirus in China was recorded on November 2019? And why did WHO only announce a pandemic in March 2020? World leaders will inevitably face these questions and the answers to them can affect international relations as much as the pandemic itself.

THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE IN THE POST-TRUMP ERA

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While campaigning for the presidency of the US, Biden's message to Europe was "we will be back". This is also reflected in the make up of the new President's foreign policy and national security team which includes experienced professionals committed to the importance of transatlantic relations and familiar with the issues affecting these relations.

While this is a refreshing change from the Trump malignancy, it will take time and effort, on both sides of the Atlantic to rebuild trust and confidence in these relations. Biden needs to rebuild a decimated Department of State; define new directions with a post-Brexit EU, an EU soon to be guided by a new German Chancellor; and seek a revitalized relationship with NATO reflecting the post-Cold War realities on both sides of the Atlantic. The latter issue is critical given the erosion of US leadership; the new challenges posed by Russia; China's ascendancy in the European arena and the weakening of Europe's commitment to democracy as evidenced in countries like Poland, Hungary, Turkey and even Italy.

The problems in US-European relations are not new. Trump's unilateralism only exacerbated these problems. He was the first post-war US president to openly question NATO's significance and the importance of article-5 of the NATO Charter. He even questioned the presence of shared values with America's European partners. In the past, in addition to issues like burden sharing, friction in trans-atlantic relations involved issues like the French and British independent nuclear deterrent forces, and the power asymmetry between the two sides of the Atlantic which was shown clearly by the US response to the Franco-British actions in the Middle East in 1956. But the alliance survived the challenges of the Cold War and redefined itself following the breakup of the USSR. Many of NATO's post-Cold War tasks were largely American inspired. One can legitimately question the value of NATO's enlargement and its expansion to Russia's doorstep, let alone some of the new NATO missions in Europe and Asia.

Trump's message of "come home America" and "America first", were not new ideas. The advocates of "America first" had a major impact on US policy prior to WWII. We all know the consequences of that policy! The "come home America" reflected the post-Vietnam blues and the reevaluation of US policy, a reevaluation also required by the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the growing domestic needs in the United States. This complicated the on-going debate about burden sharing and the shifting of US security priorities from Europe to Asia as evidenced by the priorities of the Obama administration. However, Trump's policies led to an abdication of US leadership. For the first time a US president questioned NATO's importance and the shared values in the trans-atlantic relationship; the validity of NATO's "article -5"; and took steps to end the forward deployment of US forces. Had Trump been elected to a second term, the possibility of a US pullout from NATO was real. This, in turn, triggered discussion in Europe, and in France in particular, about "strategic autonomy". In addition, Trump, unilaterally abandoned various multilateral agreements on economic, security and climate issues.

President Biden's foreign policy faces many challenges. Containment was successful. In the post-Soviet era the US found itself overextended with futile wars in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan. Nuclear proliferation is real and a serious problem with players like North Korea, Iran, Pakistan and nuclear aspirants like Turkey, and the expiration of earlier US-Russian arms control agreements. Time has come for rebuilding the transatlantic relationship as the foundation of a democratic response to the political and strategic challenges posed by Russia and China. This will require a return to realism, idealism and cooperative behavior on the part of the US. The Biden administration will abandon Trump's xenophobic abdication of leadership. Only with collaborative vision and action can the West address existential threats like climate change. At the same time, Biden faces domestic challenges, starting with the reinvigoration of US democracy, especially in the aftermath of the events leading to the insurrection in Washington on January 6, 2021, and rebuilding economic security and social justice at home. Critical domestic policy changes will need to take place while the US starts restoring its historic partnership with Europe in order to deal with issues like climate change, pandemics, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and threats to the democratic order.

While the US will need to redefine its place both at home and abroad, the same will have to be done on the European side of the Atlantic. The rebuilding of the transatlantic relationship, the bedrock of liberal democracy, benefits both Europe and the US. Europe, in the post-Brexit era, will need to develop a common economic, political and security vision for the 21sr century, if it expects the US and others to respect European autonomy. The more divided Europe remains on security, political and economic issues, the more it will remain vulnerable to external pressures and will not become a partner of the

US in global affairs. As the US returns to multilateralism and restores its commitment to earlier agreements on Iran, climate change, trade, etc., so will Europe have to engage in a new dialogue with Washington on issues like security, energy, and the role of Russia and China in Europe.

Slogans like those we heard at the end of the Cold War about a "new world order" and the quest for "liberal hegemony", are now old and discredited. The transatlantic relationship has benefited both sides for decades and will remain so, if both sides recognize and accept both their common concerns and their common goals and values.

Every time there is a leadership change in Washington, Greeks and Cypriots often speculate about the political impact this change will have on issues affecting them and their relations with the US. As members of the EU, both countries ought to be cognizant of the issues affecting them both bilaterally and multilaterally. Given the immediate problems facing the new US administration, no one should expect dramatic policy changes in the US approach to problems in SE Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean in the absence of a crisis. President Biden's long service in the US Senate has exposed him well to Turkey's revisionism. Erdogan will not enjoy the warm relationship he had with Trump and his advisor General Flynn. That relationship had already been tested with Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 system, and Turkey's violation of the US sanctions on Iran that resulted in the Congressionally imposed sanctions on Turkey. These sanctions will continue and so will the current policy on Turkey in the absence of a new crisis created by Erdogan whether in the Aegean, the Eastern Mediterranean or Libya. In the meantime, Turkey's well financed lobbying machine in Europe and in Washington has already undertaken a damage control campaign attributing the current problems in US-Turkish relations to the vacuum created by the US exit from the region, the EU's inability to assume a leadership role and to accept Turkey as an equal in its ranks. Needless to say that Turkey's rationalizations are not new. The guilt trip that Turkey's behavior is due to its neglect by the West has been repeatedly heard through out the Cold War and beyond. Now this argument has been supplemented by the fact that the West can no longer neglect resurgent Turkey, a country with a strong military industry.

Both Greece and Cyprus ought to focus on their multilateral diplomacy; restore their political presence in Washington, and expand their political alliances with other influential groups like the American-Jewish community, and all others who support the rule of law in international relations. Greece and Cyprus are not the center of the universe, as some believe. But this should not excuse their absence from the international political arena.

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We waited for four long years to see the US return to its traditional global path. Time has come for a new US commitment to multilateralism and to a democratic vision in US foreign policy.

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THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MEASURES UNDERTAKEN IN 2020 IN ORDER TO CONTROL THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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If 1989 was celebrated as the Annus Mirabillis of neoliberalism, 2020 will, probably be called the beginning of the end of the Anglo-Saxon version of neoliberalism and the promotion of a permanent state of exception in managing public affairs.

The pandemic opened the doors for the demystification and the revision of well-established doctrines in many aspects of social life. Among other crucial ambivalences, it raised, once again, the question about the relationship of science with the environment, the link of medicine and technology with dominant social structures and the role of the free markets to the promotion of wellbeing. The pandemic, also, brought again on public discourse crucial questions about the intergenerational solidarity in advanced societies and the role of the nation state as a mechanism for safeguarding the civilized human life.

Many scholars celebrated, during the first months of the pandemic, the end of the widespread market principles as a mechanism for managing public affairs. However, their intellectual myopia did not permitted them to see that societies are becoming more authoritarian.

The mortality, as well as, the very high morbidity rate of Covid-19, activated worldwide coordinated efforts – but not also measures- for the elimination of the virus mobility which accelerated, already existing trends in nearly all aspects of social life. Most countries, under the weak coordination from WHO and other international agencies, undertook three, widely accepted, policy measures as the most effective tools to control the pandemic:
-Partial or total lockdowns
-Quarantines and
-Social distancing and suspension of all economic and social activities that compose the so called "enrichment economy".

Most states, in order to mitigate the negative impact of those measures in the economy and in employment rates, adopted counterbalanced policies, which introduced as an urgent exceptional response. In my opinion, they will become, very soon, recurrent policy instruments.

The crucial dimensions, of the new reality, established with the facilitation of the pandemic, are three:
-Digitalization in, nearly, all aspects of social life.
-New employment patterns.
-Stricter conditionalities for freedom and individual rights.

Digitalization
Although the trend toward digitalization was strong before the pandemic, it accelerated rapidly in 2020, affecting human transactions at interpersonal and local, as well as, at global level. New digital platforms and applications introduced and spread, not only in visual realities, markets, e-commerce, banking services and in civilians' communication with public services. During the 2020, digitalization became a new reality in most public and private activities alike education, e-justice, digital signatures, research activities, entertainment, social solidarity and informal personal relations.

The widespread ascendance of digital tools, pushed further the development of automation and artificial intelligence and big dataset infrastructures established, composing a new instrument for surveillance and decision making.

Digitalization facilitated, also, the widespread adoption of teleworking as a necessary tool for the operation of various economic and social activities, in combination with the enforced social distancing and it, rapidly, established new employment patterns.

New employment patterns
Although telework is for more than a decade an official employment form in most advanced countries, with the exception of some particular business sectors (e.g. informatics, communications), it was concerning only a small part of labor activities until 2020. During the pandemic, telework has enforced by the authorities and implemented in most service activities, reaching more than 50% of total employment in many organizations.

As most experts estimate, telework is a new reality in employment which does not only reduce the operational cost for firms and minimize the influence of trade unions. It, also, changes the traditional spatial division between the workplace and home. This mixture causes the rearrangement of everyday household activities. Assisted by digital platforms, telework confuse work and personal life, whilst public inspection of the working conditions is very limited. These deficiencies raise the social demands for new instruments for the regulation of labor markets and social protection.

On the other side, telework, safeguards the vulnerable employees from covid-19 infection. It, also, provides to those working under this regime, with a bounded autonomy in the arrangement of their labor duties whilst it intensifies the division between intellectual and manual work and facilitates the establishment of new occupational hierarchies.

However, telework does not substitute, many, essential for social life, activities (e.g. collecting rubbish and cleaning, many health and care services, production and transportation of vital goods and so on). Although, at the symbolic level, these occupations are recognized as essential in our societies, they remain badly-paid second-class jobs and those working in these activities are more vulnerable to virus diseases.

Because of the high probability for new widespread diseases, health and care services will become new pools for employment, which will counterbalance part of the lost jobs, caused by digitalization. However, the increasing tensions between manual labor and highly skilled intellectual jobs, operated by qualified professionals from safe distant places, will be, furthermore, boosted.

The new employment patterns that telework consolidates and the contradictions with manual jobs, undermines, deeply, the economic and social structures established in the period dominated by financialization, -that is- since the '80s.

More accurately, the enforced suspension of many work activities broke-down the, so called, "enrichment economy" which was, until the pandemic, the locomotive of value creation and the major employment source in most advanced countries (cultural heritage, entertainment, hotels, restaurants, museums, exhibitions, traditional cultural routes and buildings for high added value tourism etc.). The deep recession and the high unemployment rates for, nearly, one year, in these sectors, activated new policy tools for mitigating these negative events.

These policy instruments, include the combination of liquidity with financial grands to firms, subsidized sharing employment in the activities considered as essential for the production and lump-sum benefits to those who are obligated by the authorities to become unemployed. Those, "exceptional" social protection measures create a new regime for social solidarity founded in emergency- cum- recurrent social assistance instruments which undermine, furthermore, the structural crisis of traditional social insurance institutions and adds new debt burdens on peoples. They will, probably, construct a new institutionalized nexus for public social protection in the era of digitalization and pandemics.

Health vs freedom

The instruments invented and institutionalized for the surveillance and effective implementation of social distancing, include not only restrictions in the free movement and in public protest rallies but also in the expression of opinions in social networks. They, also, institutionalize new rules for the actual realization of human rights (e.g. certification of personal immunization, surveilling commuting in public spaces, etc.) which undermine the individual freedoms, we inherited from the prosperous twentieth century.

Under these circumstances, 2020 will not be remembered as the Rat Year which is predisposed by the Chinese success against the pandemic. If the democratic social movements will not wake up and do not manage to react effectively, 2020 will probably be characterized as the turning point for the establishment of the global and permanent "state of exception".

EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY – CONCEPT, DRIVERS, CHALLENGES

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2020 will probably enter history as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a truly global character and direct impact on our daily life, it has accelerated existing trends such as digitalisation and the US-China rivalry, while the sanitary emergency shifted political priorities (Schwab, Malleret 2020). For the EU the pandemic was no less of a watershed moment. Notwithstanding the assignment of responsibilities between member states and the EU institutions and despite initial delays, cooperation within the EU framework gained traction both in health matters and in cushioning the socio-economic consequences of this exogenous shock. The pandemic increased awareness of the high dependence on imported medical equipment and medicines, and more generally of the fragility of global supply chains due to unforeseen large-scale disruptions. This realisation triggered renewed reflection on the need for strategic autonomy.

Several think tanks have worked on the **concept**. SWP stressed that *strategic autonomy* is broader than military aspects, arguing that a shift toward greater European strategic autonomy is necessary, urgent and possible, albeit challenging and sensitive for Germany as it would require the modification of traditional policy positions (Lippert et al 2019). Bruegel discussed the challenges for EU *economic sovereignty* stemming from separately dealing with economic and geopolitical/security interests. Issues such as state aids, competition policy, investment screening, export controls, the international role of the euro, the role of development banks, the payments infrastructure and the global governance system are highlighted and recommendations offered for adapting the EU political system (Leonard et al 2019). ECFR proposed five agendas for a European *strategic sovereignty* (health, economic, digital, climate change and traditional security); the EU should promote new rules faced with countries undermining the rules-based multilateral system (Leonard, Shapiro 2020). An EPC paper traced the current debate, focusing on economic aspects (Grevi 2020).

Challenged by both erratic US policies under Trump and China's assertiveness, President von der Leyen, when forming the political pact with the European Parliament, declared in December 2019 the ambition to lead a

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'geopolitical Commission'. During 2020 the EP gave a strong impulse on *strategic autonomy* thinking. EU High Representative referred to '*open strategic autonomy'* to avoid any implication of protectionism (Borrell 2020). These concepts explicit and solidify the idea of *European sovereignty* expressed by French President Macron in his Sorbonne speech (September 2017). Yet, it is not sufficient for the EU 'to talk the talk'; it must also be prepared 'to walk the walk'. This is easier said than done. Strategic autonomy is not an abstract notion. It presupposes a clear *common* idea of the values and interests to be defended *together* over a longer period of time. 'Lack of political will' offers an easy 'explanation' why the EU is slow to (re)act on international developments, even in the form of declarations and statements. The simple truth is that EU action is below expectations each time member states value particular interests higher than the overarching common interest. Earlier attempts to formulate an EU strategy went little beyond identifying common threats and a common approach (European Security Strategy 2003) or defining priorities and action strands (EU Global Strategy 2016). The ongoing work on a 'Strategic Compass' will hopefully result in sufficiently concrete commitments for capabilities and a shared understanding for their use (Schütz 2020).

US policies in recent years, by creating confusion and uncertainty, acted as a **driver** leading Europeans to reflect on their security and strategic autonomy; and on the active role they need to play in order to preserve the liberal international system and shape its further evolution with a view to promoting their interests, in accordance with their values. The Biden administration, while welcomed for its anticipated predictability and cooperative attitude towards allies or partners, has led some to think that the US policy would return to the familiar role of security provider. The German Defence Minister declared: "illusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end" (Kramp-Karrenbauer 2020). President Macron profoundly disagreed with what he qualified as a historical misinterpretation (Macron 2020). Indeed, expecting the US to continue providing security for Europe is misreading the political mood and internal necessity to prioritise healing the wounds of the pandemic, extreme polarisation and inter-racial violence. Europeans should not lose valuable time but rather prepare to cope with present and future challenges. 20 years ago, a German statesman, Helmut Schmidt, had warned Europeans not to take the transatlantic alliance for granted and be united in case their fundamental interests would not coincide or collide with those of the US. He urged Germans and French to go beyond the petty conflicts of the day, and see together the big picture of a multi-polar world dominated by continent-wide states, where Europe would be marginalised if not united (Schmidt 2000).

US Presidents Bush and Obama had been pushing for burden-sharing and urging Europeans to assume more responsibilities for their own security, particularly in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood. This will not change

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under Biden. EU strategic autonomy does not mean decoupling from NATO and the US in security terms. NATO remains important, especially if committed to its ambition to be a politico-military alliance based on common values, the only sustainable basis for a stronger role in addressing security challenges posed by China, as stipulated in the recent vision document NATO 2030.[1] Strategic autonomy does not imply cutting the transatlantic bond, but rather the EU becoming a strong partner of the US and Canada within NATO, bringing into the alliance its political capital and capabilities; not following decisions taken in Washington, but co-shaping common decisions. The Communication on a new EU-US agenda for global change is a step in this direction (European Commission, High Representative 2020). Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey are among the issues discussed. [2] The postponement of substantive decisions by the European Council of 10 December 2020 is understandable given the NATO membership of Turkey and the EU offer to coordinate with the Biden administration the position to adopt. It is important that the EU took this initiative and that EU-US relations, while also concerning NATO, are not confined to NATO channels as they are much broader in scope.

The **challenges** in the Eastern Mediterranean, which did not appear at first but further intensified in 2020 with the militarisation of Turkey's foreign policy, its activism on various fronts (Syria, Libya, Caucasus) and its pursuance of regional power status, are of direct concern to the EU, whose security interests are affected by instability and further destabilisation in the region. The ongoing confrontation between Turkey (qualified as 'frenemy') and the EU highlights the need of a sustainable framework for their relations that will balance the protection of European interests (territorial integrity, rule of law, energy) with dialogue and cooperation with an important regional actor (Barnes-Dacey, Dworkin 2020).

International cooperation, partnerships and alliances are part of an effective foreign policy of the EU as a global actor. Yet, the EU must uphold its principles and commitments to ensure its credibility among EU citizens; otherwise, its legitimacy would suffer. Two examples should suffice.
- EU foreign policy being guided by the principles of international law (art. 21 TEU) implies full respect of international treaties by all. In the case of Turkey's claims on maritime zones in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean it implies that parties to the disputes engage in dialogue; were negotiations not to reach a peaceful dispute settlement,

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[1] The security environment will be a world in which "**assertive authoritarian states with revisionist foreign policy agendas seek to expand their power and influence**" (p.5, emphasis added). The document mentions China and Russia; any resemblance with a significant NATO member is presumably unintended.

[2] "The EU and the US share a strategic interest in a stable and secure Eastern Mediterranean. We should seek a coordinated approach in our relations with Turkey, including by addressing current challenges." p. 9

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the EU should urge parties to submit the case to international jurisdiction.

- With respect to arms exports, the EU is bound by the Common Position 2008/944/CFSP which established eight criteria for member states to apply when considering export licences for third countries. Despite repeated calls from the European Parliament, decision-making remains with national authorities. Still, EU credibility requires that such decisions are made fully in accordance with the Common Position, which would clearly imply stopping arms exports to Turkey. A mechanism to scrutinise national decisions against the EU criteria should be established.

EU solidarity is needed, first and foremost, when member states are faced with existential threats; while all interests need to be taken into account, when it comes to vital interests there cannot and should not be any compromise. Only in this way will the EU ensure both its legitimacy internally and the respect of external actors. Still, the challenge is broader; it concerns EU security, which is directly affected by instability and destabilisation in its immediate neighbourhood. European security presupposes strategic autonomy which, in turn, requires freedom of action and the will to determine the common European destiny.

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A NEW ERA STARTS: BC (BEFORE CORONA), AC (AFTER CORONA) – OUR COUNTRIES HAVE CHANGED THEIR FACES

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> I can't keep silent in light of *how my country has changed her face*, won't quit trying to remind her.
> In her ears, I'll sing my cries until she opens her eyes. I can't keep silent of *how my country has changed her face.*
> Ehud Manor, Israeli poet,
> Quoted by Nancy Pelosi, US
> House Speaker, 12 January 2021.[1]

Perhaps we can learn something from history. For example, that sometimes history repeats itself. Things won't exactly recur, but major phenomena and trends might do. World War I (WWI); World War II (WWII); the period between them; the post WWII period - - these times and events show that when a crisis bears huge dimensions, its repercussions will be likewise enormous. The Covid-19 pandemic is no exception.

WWI + WWII were the first total wars in modern history. This means that the country's entire population was called up because of the magnitude of the war and its global dimensions. Until WWI armies were manned and wars waged by troops who belonged to specific sectors of society. These combatants, many of them mercenaries, benefitted from the war, were paid and rewarded during the war and afterwards. Other sectors who weren't called up, neither profited from the war nor experienced betterment in their status, welfare, rights, etc. But WWI was different: men went to the trenches in France where they encountered gas warfare, artillery, shell-shocks, etc. Women replaced them at home, ran the industry, operated the lathes, produced ammunition, ploughed the fields, and fulfilled many other errands.

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[1] Ehud Manor (1941 – 2005), Israeli poet and songwriter, quoted by Nansi Pelosi, U.S. House Speaker, 12 JAN 2021. (Emphases added). Pelosi urged the removal of US President Donald Trump from office over his supporters' storming of the Capitol. See also Manor's poem "I have no other land" (Hebrew: "אין לי ארץ אחרת").

When the war was over the disenfranchised classes that helped achieving victory refused to go back to their traditional occupations and roles. Instead, they demanded vast social, economic, and political reforms. Achieving female suffrage, an example of the reforms that were enacted between the two world wars (suffrage for all, women inclusive, plus vote rights for men and minorities that hitherto were excluded from the ballots), is regarded by some as the greatest social/political reform of the 20th century. WWI being a total war and huge crisis brought about the major changes mentioned here.

WWII followed suit. Indeed, it is a classic example that corroborates our argument. Total mobilization of a country's population was applied quite early in the war. Alas, this was inadequate to win a war of the magnitude of WWII. Each participant needed to increase considerably its military power by adding many thousands of troops. In WWI American troops were imported and helped the Entente against the Central Powers. In WWII more soldiers were needed in addition to Americans. The imperial powers solved the problem: they went to their colonies and brought manpower and commodities to increase their power and tilt the balance in their favor. Hundreds of thousands of colonial combatants from all over the world fought in Asia and Europe, helping Britain and France in particular to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan.

The compensation era of post WWII was not late to emerge: the colonial world refused to remain colonial. Instead it demanded benefits, profits and rewards for fighting side by side with their imperial masters against Nazism and Fascism. Above all the colonial world demanded independence. Reluctantly, slowly, painfully, with lots of blood-shed, the imperial powers succumbed eventually to these demands. The de-colonization era started. It was the greatest international political reform of the 19th and 20th centuries. This, too, was a result of WWII being the greatest ever calamity and the greatest total war.

The Corona pandemic consists of similar elements. Very rarely one comes across a crisis that bears so many deep damaged facets. All have been extremely harmful, some even fatal, many others will never fully recover. Economy, medicine, politics, employment, tourism, ground and aerial transportation, movement of people, education, human rights, legal rights - - all are enormously affected. It is clearer if one adds the negative prefix to these affected facets: do not say employment but unemployment. And so on. The Corona crises are not yet over, and it is too early to gauge their precise dimensions. One obvious and perhaps trivial one, is that the wealth of deep problems that the Corona created exclude an option of no major detrimental implications when the pandemic is over. Resumption of pre-Corona full normalcy once people are vaccinated is not at all a sure option. Our countries did change their faces as stated Speaker Pelosi.

One issue should worry people, particularly those of us who live in western style democracies. Quite early in the pandemic governments and executives were quick to abolish various restrictions on their powers, applied emergency measures that included suspensions, restrictions, and limitations on elementary rights of individuals, as well as of entire groups and communities. In various countries demonstrations and public events were heavily curtailed or totally forbidden. The military was called to run various services that are purely civil. In Israel, for example, imposed isolation in specially assigned hotels on civilians suspected as Corona patients, is operated by the military. The Israeli secret service ("SHABAK", שב"כ) that normally attempts to thwart terrorism, was called to apply its cutting-edge technologies to locate mobile phones of people who were in the proximity of Corona patients.

It was wise and appropriate to use these organizations, to apply emergency restrictions, and to curtail various civil rights. The question is whether civil rights will be given back; the military will go back to its barracks; and secret services will again be busy thwarting terrorism the moment normalcy prevailed. A new era will then start: **BC** (before Corona) and **AC** (after Corona). What will it look like?

THE EU, TURKEY AND THE FALSE PROMISE OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

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Up to now, the academic research on the use of economic sanctions shows they are not very effective despite the fact that they are preferred by governments as an alternative to military intervention. In historical perspective, economic sanctions are ineffective. Indicatively, economic sanctions did not have significant impact on Italy in 1935 due to the invasion of Ethiopia, nor on the USSR during the Cold War by the US, or on Israel by the Arab states.

Why economic sanctions fail? A possible explanation could be the countermeasures. Since economic sanctions are used as a means of pressure to change a political behavior or erode the political stability of a state, then the target-state is likely to respond in the same way. A typical example is the sanctions imposed by Russia on the EU due to crisis in Ukraine. Another explanation could be the alternatives. The target-state will not sustain the sanctions without doing nothing. Instead, it will seek to diminish the cost of sanctions by expanding partnerships with other partners. Cuba, for example, turned to the USSR after the US embargo, while Yugoslavia responded to Soviet sanctions by increasing trade with the West. Third, economic sanctions are more likely to have the opposite effect since they can lead to a greater convergence of a country's political system in order to respond to an "external attack".

At the macroeconomic level, sanctions have a significant impact on reducing bilateral trade between the parties involved but not on the overall volume of trade of the target country with third parties.

The conditions under which economic sanctions become effective have to do both with the time of their imposition and with the economic power of the states concerned. They should be implemented immediately, the target state should be moderate and less powerful than those imposing the sanctions.

Turkey, as a target country does not meet these conditions for the following reasons: first and foremost, the element of determination has been lost. It's a long time since the escalation of Greek-Turkish relations took place in combination with the peculiarities of the decision-making process of the Common Foreign and Security Policy which reduces the dynamics of imposing sanctions.

Second, the goal is very ambitious. The use of economic sanctions does not concern democracy, the rule of law or human rights abuses, but critical issues, such as avoidance of war and territorial disputes. According to the Policy Department for External Relations (2020), the most effective sanctions are related to democracy (47%) while the most ineffective are related to security issues, such as territorial disputes (28%) or avoidance of war (21%).

Third, Turkey is a significant economic power, given that it is the 19th largest economy after Saudi Arabia according to 2019 measurements, with a large industry and service sector. Regarding its bilateral relations with the EU it is considered to be an important player for the European economy. According to the European Commission (2019), Turkey was the 5th largest trading partner while the EU is by far Turkey's first import and export partner, as well as a significant source of investment. The 32.3% imports in Turkey derive from the EU and the rest from Russia, China, USA and India. During the decade 2009-2019 both imports and exports increased with a positive balance for the EU. The volume of transactions is further strengthened by the customs union between the EU and Turkey, which entered into force in 1995, covering industrial goods but not agriculture, while in 2016 the European Commission proposed further strengthening of bilateral trade relations, such as services and sustainable development. In addition, Turkey is contributing to the economic integration of the wider Mediterranean region as a member of Euromed with the ultimate goal of creating a free trade area, which in the future may lead to a greater degree of integration. Furthermore, the fact that the EU and Turkey have only one case of trade dispute in the World Trade Organization (2020) compared to the total of 123 cases the EU has with other countries (35 concern the US, 9 China and 6 Japan) shows that there are good trade relations between them.

However, economic sanctions are still considered a useful tool by governments when they are part of a broader strategy. What makes sanctions more effective, or at least contributes to some extent to achieving the goal, are the "smart" ones, that is, targeted sanctions, especially when combined to facilitate a possible military intervention, as in the case of the US in Iraq in 1990.

Up to now, the economic sanctions imposed by the EU in North Korea, Iran, Russia and Belarus do not seem effective, since the current situation has not been reversed. Therefore, in economic terms, the imposition of sanctions

does not seem possible and if it takes place it will be rather symbolic without a significant impact on the Turkish economy. We should also take into account the economic aid of 6 billion euros provided by the EU to Turkey to manage the refugee problem. On the other hand, financial sanctions are not part of a broader strategy and they will not be considered as a prelude to military intervention, since the EU does not have the capacity and the operational tools to accomplish it, even if it achieves unanimity.

Therefore, Greece and Cyprus must seek measures of effective pressure on Turkey in order to take advantage of their position in the EU and should not count on inefficient measures which are rather symbolic than essential.

2020 IN REVIEW: GREECE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EAST MEDITERRANEAN

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Greece pursued a multidimensional foreign policy throughout 2020 that aimed to safeguard and promote its national interests in the conduct of relations with other countries, at bilateral and multilateral levels. Cementing relations with regional countries, protecting Greek and European interests from Turkish aggression, enhancing the strategic partnership with the United States of America have been the three top foreign policy priorities for Greece in 2020.

Greece has cooperated with regional countries to create a common course of action for the development and transportation of regional energy resources, and for the maintenance of stability and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean. In January 2020, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus signed an intergovernmental agreement to support the construction of the East Mediterranean Gas Pipeline that will funnel gas reserves from Israel and Cyprus to Otranto in Italy via the island of Crete and mainland Greece. In November 2020, the 3rd Trilateral Meeting of the Greek, Israeli and Cypriot Defense Ministers reached a common agreement for the intensification of the defence cooperation mechanisms, including a 3+1 format, with partner countries which share the same values and maintain a keen interest for the defence and security developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, such as the United States of America.

On a parallel level, the tripartite partnership of Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus expanded from energy to military cooperation. The «Medusa 10» aeronautical training exercise was conducted the first week of December 2020 and involved the Egyptian, Greek, and Cypriot armed forces. The annual training exercise combined air and naval along with ground forces and enhances the exchange of combat and field expertise. It included scenarios for the protection of critical energy infrastructure in the Mediterranean against any potential threats.

Greece has succeeded in 2020 through consistent diplomatic actions to prove that it is a credible regional partner that collectively with like-minded countries opposes any actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean

Seas that could challenge stability, violate international law, or undermine good neighborly relations. Turkey's employment of the so-called gunboat diplomacy in the form of aggressive diplomatic activities with the implicit or explicit use of naval power extended from the Greek island of Kastelorizo in the Aegean and west of Cyprus to the southeast of the Greek island of Crete and the offshore waters of Libya has prompted a coordinated regional response.

Greece and Egypt in particular signed an agreement on the partial delimitation of their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in an apparent response to the illegal Turkey-Libya Memorandum of Understanding on the demarcation of maritime boundaries signed in November 2019 that served as a vehicle of Turkey to deploy its neo-ottoman strategy as it allows the carrying out of exploration and drilling operations over a maritime area that crosses though the EEZs of Greece and Egypt, and where the East Mediterranean Gas Pipeline agreed by Greece, Israel and Cyprus will have to cross. The Greek-Egypt partial delimitation agreement was signed in August 2020 and demarcates a maritime area that extends from the 26th Meridian, at the eastern end of the Greek island of Crete to the 28th Meridian at the Greek island of Rhodes granting 55% of the divided maritime zone to Egypt and 45% to Greece. The agreement is outcome of long-year negotiations and, is in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which recognizes all the rights of coastal states in their maritime zones, invalidating de jure Turkish assertions that Greek islands do not have an EEZ. In so doing, it assigns to Greece and Egypt waters claimed by Turkey and Libya in their illegal MoU.

Greece also signed in June 2020 an agreement with Italy for the delimitation of maritime boundaries in the Ionia Sea and reached a mutual consent with Albania to appeal to the International Court of Justice for the delimitation of their EEZs in the Ionian Sea. The signing by Greece in good faith of maritime delimitation agreements with Italy and Egypt and the Greek readiness to resume negotiations with the rest of its neighbours, including Turkey, for the conclusion of similar agreements, in full respect of the provisions of the Law of the Sea, clearly exposes Turkey's neo-Ottoman ambitions, promoted through revisionism that endanger peace in the wider region.

Greece also successfully countered an asymmetrical threat from Turkey in March 2020 that directed the passage of thousand of illegal migrants to the European land border of Evros in Northern Greece and the sea borders in the Aegean Sea. The efficient guarding of the Greek land and sea borders led to the reduction of migrant flows by over 80% in 2020 with absolute respect of human life, and invalidated Turkey's strategy of weaponizing migrants against Europe.

Throughout 2020, Greece solidified its strategic partnership with the United States of America. Washington seems to realize that the security of partners and allies in the Eastern Mediterranean region like Greece is critical to the security of the United States.

The American energy and security policies towards Greece have been explicitly cited the East Med Act of 2019 in support of the trilateral dialogue on energy cooperation conducted among Israel, Greece, and Cyprus; encouragement of American companies to make investments in the energy sector of the region; rejection of interference by other countries in the EEZ of Cyprus and the airspace of Greece; and, security cooperation not only for the protection of critical infrastructure from unauthorized intrusion or terrorism but also for the maintenance of stability.

To this end, Washington committed throughout 2020 to maintain a vigorous naval presence in the naval facility at Souda Bay in the Greek island of Crete and to construct a second base at Souda Bay. Washington continued the deployment of the unmanned aerial vehicle MQ-9 Reaper to the Larissa Air Force base in northern Greece, the conduct of US Army helicopter training in central Greece and the carrying out of multinational aeronautical exercises with the participation of the Greek armed forces.

The American-Greek relationship has also expanded to the field of energy. The completion of the Greek section of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, the Alexandroupoli floating storage gasification unit project, and the Kavala underground gas storage are important infrastructure projects. American export of Liquefied Natural Gas to the Balkans via Greece is a reality that can be further enhanced in the years to come. The 2nd high-level Strategic Dialogue meeting of the Energy Working Group that convened in June 2020 acknowledged the constructive role of Greece in the 3+1 mechanism and the East Mediterranean Gas Forum.

Greece is a uniquely positioned country and constructive member of the international community that pursues an active foreign policy and coalition building which have lit the engines of broader cooperation, demonstrating that regional and international mechanisms and partnerships are not mere talking shops, but are instead designers of a grand strategy. It is with no doubt that, Greece will capitalize on last year's active foreign policy successes and will continue equally dynamically in 2021.

HAS EDUCATION BEEN THE WEAK LINK OF 2020? A CRITICAL REFLECTION OF EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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The Covid-19 pandemic has been the most daunting barrier perplexing education. Yet, in 2020 we recorded numerous issues related to educational endeavours in Cyprus. Reasonably, we may portray education as a pendulum swinging between:
- the lack of a comprehensive strategy for re-operating schools after summer holidays amid a pandemic, and the postponement of the start of the school year under the pretext of heat and high temperatures;
- students' and teachers' placement in and out of quarantine (from the very first week of the operation of the schools for the new school year), and the use of distance-learning strategies by schools lacking the technological means;
- the "suffocating" – literally and pedagogically - use of masks by teachers and students (the rules of use of which were changed at least three times by the Ministry), and the questionable measures chosen by the Ministry for mastering students' social-distancing in the classrooms;
- the 'heated' debates for the installation of air-conditioners in classrooms in a country often exceeding temperatures of 40 degrees, and the complete burnout of the educational community;
- 'hooligan' behaviours and animal abuse manifested in a secondary school and the division of public opinion for the disciplinary prosecution of the painter-teacher for his works with the title 'Anti-systemic art'.

Arguably, what we conclude is that the current situation raises many questions both for the operation of the Ministry of Education, but also for the operation of the schools themselves. One may reasonably wonder why when reputed think tanks on the international stage, such as Rand, were cautioning policy-makers around the world about the need for long-term school planning taking into consideration the possibility of new lockdowns, the Ministry of Education in Cyprus still appears to lack a tangible plan eight months after our first national lockdown? Why the Ministry has not developed and implemented any strategies for the technological advancement of schools? Why the Ministry has not paid any efforts for providing nation-wide training

to teachers, students, and parents in the use distance-learning technologies? Why the Ministry has not launched any organised programmes for providing nation-wide psychological support to students and their families to help them refrain from the restrains of the pandemic? If we accept that the operation of all Ministries is not a "one (wo)man's show", why does the Ministry of Education always seems to be lagging behind?

The grey zones of our educational system show that the re-organisation of our Ministry of Education and schools entails an imperative need. Unfortunately, any changes that have been attempted thus far seem to lack a clear vision and long-term planning. Redefining our vision for education must be urgently added on the political agenda, on the basis of which our educational policies should also be redefined, as well as the regulations that govern the operation of schools. The Covid-19 crisis that we are currently witnessing creates the momentum for changing our educational paradigm based on the axis of technological development, on the one hand, and humanism, on the other. Our suggestion is that defining a new vision for education should draw on the paradigm of techno-humanism. Techno-humanism aims at the effective use of technology for the enhancement, development, and empowerment of active citizens, who work to improve social processes for both social inclusion and livelihood.

On the basis of this new paradigm, the Ministry of Education should build - from the very beginning - the organisational management of our educational system. The lack of a crystalised plan for organisational management is perhaps the root cause of most challenges in the field of education. Organisational management refers to the definition of the desired values, rules, systems, beliefs and habits, attitudes, interactions with the outside world, and future expectations guiding our education system. It manifests itself in the way that an organisation, such as the Ministry of Education, plans and conducts its activities, deals with human resources and the student community, but also cooperates with other socio-political institutions. The significance of organisational management lies in the fact that it may enhance results, innovation, and interactions in the field of education.

Going a step further, the development of a successful organisational management plan presupposes the development of a positive organisational culture of change by the Ministry of Education (to be also implemented in schools). Culture is defined as the system of assumptions, values and beliefs shared by the members of an organisation. Therefore, the development of a positive organisational culture can strengthen any leadership efforts attempted by the Ministry of Education, by defining, among other things, what is considered as 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviour on the part of the education community. In this way, effective organisational culture may demolish the barriers to cooperation between isolated individuals or groups by creating bridges of communication between the Ministry of Education and

schools, guide decision-making, improve workflow by activating the opportunities provided to the teachers' and students' communities, and enhance effectiveness, while also contributing to the achievement of our vision for education.

In conclusion, culture plays a catalytic role in organisational planning and effective leadership based on the definition of the desired vision, goals, and values. Effective organisational cultures in education should be characterised by values such as professionalism, inclusion, recognition and reward, embracing innovation, evolution and change, shared leadership and teamwork, open and direct communication, while focusing on the needs of teachers' and students' communities. May this crisis become the incentive for educational change!

TOWARDS A 'FIFTY-FIFTY' POLITICAL SOCIETY?

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Political sociologists generally argue that changes in politics follow respective changes in social structures, norms and behaviours. Social changes are sometimes slow, while in other cases they happen overnight. The latter is the case when politics intersect with society. As infamously quoted by Lenin 'there are decades where nothing happens and there are weeks where decades happen'. The present article aims to highlight a worrying trend in Cyprus politics of recent years, and not only of the previous year 2020, that points to a total separation between the insiders of the political process and all those who remain outside. Although this new state of affairs has emerged rather suddenly in Cyprus compared to other European societies, it has been incubating for some years now and arguably the year 2020 has aggravated the problem.

This new state of affairs could be schematically described as a 'fifty-fifty' (50%-50%) political society, and points to the creation of two entirely different worlds: one 'inhabited' by the various political and party elites and other partisans and who show increased interest and participation in politics (the insiders). The other 'world' is 'inhabited' by the remaining of the population, what we might conventionally call the ordinary citizens, and who show no interest or whatsoever in the political process (the outsiders). The reasons why this latter group withdraws from politics and their numbers steadily increase vary, but as the year 2020 has shown, EU's inefficiency in some areas (e.g., the handling of the pandemic), the increased numbers of scandals and corruption, the failure of political personnel to deliver on their electoral promises, are among the principal reasons for this development.

The term 'fifty-fifty' society draws from a respective sociological term. Social scientists have long used the analytical term 'two-thirds societies' to critically examine social developments in advanced, industrial societies. The term usually applies to the western, affluent societies and is used to denote that, in these societies, the two-thirds of the population enjoy the benefits of affluence, while the remaining one-third is locked into poverty or near-poverty. Moreover, the deprived one third is usually socially marginalized and suffers from multiple and often overlapping social and economic inequalities

and deprivations. These, in turn, usually translate to political inequalities as well, i.e., fewer chances for participation in politics and with less possibilities for successful engagement.

Political science has also been problematized for some time now for a related development that takes place in the political sphere: this could be labelled the phenomenon of the 'fifty-fifty' society. This term describes a situation whereby citizens' involvement and engagement in political affairs is constantly decreasing. Almost half of the population (and sometimes more) in many western societies abstain from any form of politics either consciously (e.g., as protest against the increased instances of corruption in the political system) or because of marginalization and multiple exclusions. Participation in the elections and in political organizations -not to mention other indices measuring distrust in political parties, governments and parliaments- are the most profound examples of this phenomenon and Cyprus is no more an exception.

All elections that took place in Cyprus in the 2010s (parliamentary, presidential, local and European) verify this trend. Regardless of the causes, Cyprus society is now experiencing all the manifestations of political malaise that many countries of the EU have experienced in previous years: low turnover in elections, faded partisanship, huge levels of distrust towards political institutions, etc. Yet, this should not come as surprise since all the symptoms of citizens' disapproval of the political system have been nurtured in Cyprus for some time now. What is indeed surprisingly is the velocity with which these developments found their expression in political life given that, in Cyprus, party identification and politicization have been traditionally strong. This was partly due to the unresolved national (Cyprus) problem and partly because of the strength of the left-right divide; both are no longer influencing political behaviour as they used to do.

The sudden and extended disengagement that occurred in Cyprus in recent years is not unrelated to the process of Europeanization that Cypriot society went through either; in some occasions a violent Europeanization (March 2013 bail-in). Europeanization was fast and unsettling for Cyprus society. In many respects, it introduced new paradigms of political behaviour, which are more sceptical towards the political establishment and established political practices. Increased levels of education and communication with abroad have augmented both the political sophistication of Cypriots and their suspiciousness towards politicians. Moreover, and despite the promises given in abundance, Cypriots were left disappointed both by the EU and their national political leadership on various issues, the Cyprus problem included. The perceived inability of the national and European leaderships to protect them during what was probably the worst economic crisis in the history of capitalism aggravated their disappointment with political institutions and organizations. Other, internal factors also took their toll on Cypriots distrust

of the political system, more important among them the increased levels of political corruption and the continuous institutional tension among various branches and institutions in the political system. Taken together, all the above seem to have unsettled the political culture upon which political behaviour in Cyprus is based.

As all elections in recent years reveal, Cyprus has entered a period of dealignment, which indicates a crisis of representation. The Cypriot citizen does not trust (mainly the) national and European political institutions and particularly the political parties. In a context where state sovereignty is constantly reduced and EU member states are deprived from significant tools of political and economic administration, the Cypriot citizens see no meaning in partaking in a political process that fails them. Abstention has become a systemic feature of Cypriot electoral politics, with many voters deliberately abstaining to punish the political parties and to convey their anger at the entire political system for its failure to respond to their concerns.

Rightfully or wrongly, citizens believe that they have no control over the political processes and feel unable to influence decisions that affect them. Therefore, they see no point in participating in politics and they disengage from the political process altogether. Yet, this worrying situation does not seem to bother anymore the political elites who show signs of compromise and acceptance of this tendency. Unable and often unwilling to turn the tide around, the political parties and the political elites also withdraw in their own closed world of governing institutions as aptly pointed by Mair (2013). In this way, two entirely different worlds are created with the distance between them constantly growing: that of the political elites and that of the ordinary citizens. This, in turn, not only delegitimizes traditional and mainstream political institutions and organizations such as political parties, but it also paves the ground for populist solutions to gain ground.

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