



SPECIAL ISSUE: The Socioeconomic and Political Impact of COVID 19 and the Response of the EU: A Critical Assessment

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1993-2021 TWENTY EIGHT YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

Editor's Note



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For more than a year the world is facing unique circumstances as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. As it has been already stressed by several state leaders and many others this is the worse crisis since the end of World War II.

In addition to the millions of infections and the people who died, the COVID-19 crisis has manifested multiple dimensions. The way of life in almost all countries has been seriously affected. We have also witnessed a serious disruption of economic activity and a major recession. And we are not in a position to precisely define the characteristics of normalization and when this will come.

During this period there was in many countries a serious debate about the wisdom and/or the imperativeness of lockdowns as well as other measures which contained civil liberties due to the extraordinary conditions. There was also a serious criticism of countries and leaders in relation to how the pandemic has been handled.

This special issue attempts to address different aspects of the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 as well as the record of the EU in addressing it effectively. We published a similar issue last year (“COVID-19 Outbreak: Political, Economic and Social Repercussions”, Volume 17, Issue 3, May 2020) at the initial stages of the pandemic. At the time the EU was serious criticized as its reactions were considered sluggish and inadequate.

The economic paradigm of the Eurozone was also criticized during the previous Euro-debt crisis. Indicatively it was stressed that in times of recessions it is deeply erroneous to insist on a policy of balanced budgets and primary surpluses. With the devastating impact of COVID-19 it was eventually understood that the strict fiscal rules and discipline had to be suspended. That was well done; but the extra radical step, a decision for a European Marshall Plan that could be partially financed by “helicopter money”, was never taken.

It will be an omission if I do not mention that the handling of the vaccination program in the EU has been disappointing. What is worse is that the unnecessary delays will be costly in socioeconomic terms while they may also lead to more infections and deaths. During the previous Euro-debt crisis I was very critical of the Troika philosophy and practices. Retrospectively, it has been acknowledged that there were excesses and wrong policies. The crisis caused by COVID-19 led to a new state of affairs. And there have been great expectations from the EU which were not fulfilled.

Undoubtedly, the EU faces seriously challenges; the “credibility deficit” seems to be one of the most important ones. This particular *In Depth* issue entitled “The Socioeconomic and Political Impact of COVID 19 and the Response of the EU: A Critical Assessment” hosts authors with different perspectives on these questions and dilemmas. Our objective is to enrich the ongoing debate. To the extent that the ideas put forward by the selected authors lead to a more enlightened public and contribute to better decisions, that will be a success.

THE EU'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS, PART 2



Achilles C. Emilianides
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In May 2020 I published in volume 17, issue 3 of IN DEPTH, an article entitled 'The EU's Response to the Covid-19 Crisis'. I noted that the initial reaction of the EU to the crisis had been disappointing, and that the EU had failed to act early or collectively, despite having the scientific expertise, protocols and potential to do so. I further observed that the failure of the EU to act, had led to an incoherent communication strategy which inaccurately claimed that public health issues do not fall under the competence of the EU. I stressed that the adoption of a new 'Marshall Plan' for the EU was urgently needed, not only due to the dire need of member states for financial support in order to overcome the crisis, but also because the grounds necessitating the support were not only financial, but deeply political, since without such support the citizens of the EU are gradually losing their confidence to the European system of co-operation. I further noted that the package adopted by the EU with the Eurogroup decision of 9.4.2020 was underwhelming, and that there was a repetition of past failed policies, despite the rhetoric that the errors of the past will not be repeated.

One might have thought that we had already seen the worst of the EU. However, the EU vaccine fiasco was another stark reminder that the EU is failing to realize that the primary consideration should always be the welfare of its citizens. There have been numerous analyses during the past few months dissecting why the EU vaccination policy has failed. The EU has once again attempted to deflect blame by threatening to block Covid-19 vaccine exports, and arguing that their contracting parties – in particular AstraZeneca – had failed to fulfil their contractual obligations. However, the publication of the AstraZeneca agreement by the EU failed to corroborate such claims, as it became obvious that terms giving the EU priority had never been agreed. Even during the publication of the AstraZeneca agreement, the EU officials neglected to ensure that the redacted parts of the agreement would not be visible in the bookmarks of the text, further giving the impression of amateurism. Even the most important Member States, such as Germany or France, have often seemed to doubt the EMA (European Medicines Agency) approval, introducing restrictions to the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for

the elder population, and even for a time suspending its use altogether pending further investigation, fueling the anti-vaccine movement.

The substance of the issue is, however, that the EU has failed to properly assess the situation. Whereas, the US, UK, and Israel realized that this was not a time to care about pricing, but only to ensure speedy delivery, the EU has followed the same frugal policy it has been advocating for a decade. This time, however, the implications did not refer merely to the south-European countries, but to the entire EU population. The EU purportedly tried to 'avoid spending needlessly taxpayers money', at a time when such an intention could hardly sound more hollow. The economy of the Member States of the EU has been in ruins for one year due to the measures introduced in order to tackle the pandemic. The impact on the financial situation and everyday life of EU citizens has been unprecedented in EU history. The damage inflicted in the real economy is incalculable. If there was a time that the taxpayers money needed to be spent immediately and without any considerations, this was it. The EU bureaucracy could not realize this. It kept negotiating over prices, when even countries led by two far right-wing leaders proceeded to immediately sign the agreements and started vaccinating people without delay. The EU officials failed, whereas Donald Trump and Boris Johnson succeeded. Whereas the previous sentence might seem incredible, this does not make it any less true.

The damage inflicted to the European economy by the additional delay in vaccinations is disastrous, and has potentially led to an increased number of deaths and harm from diseases, financial disaster, and further deterioration of the level of welfare of EU citizens. This has been a really damaging blow to all who would wish for the EU to emerge as a leading political actor. The EU simply seems incapable of handling any important issue effectively; it is nowhere close to the US in future technological competitiveness; it proved incapable of reacting effectively to the 2008 global economic crisis, and Southern Europe still suffers because of this; it seems unwilling to safeguard even the territorial protection and material interests of its Member States (the case of Cyprus being an obvious example); it has even suffered the blow of the exit of one of the most politically and symbolically important European states through Brexit; several of its Member States openly dispute core European values; and now this. In an article I published in volume 10, issue 2 of IN DEPTH in April 2013 I noted that the paradigm of the EU as we knew it is dead, and that a new paradigm has to arise. 8 years later the EU officials and politicians do not even seem to have even realized that there is a problem.

PAYING FOR NEXT GENERATION EU



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Most commentators agree that the NGEU recovery package adopted by the EU to counter the severe downturn triggered by the pandemic is both bold and innovative. But a key aspect of it has received only limited attention, namely how the money to be borrowed by the EU will be repaid.

The proposed answer is to allow the EU to raise new taxes, known in EU jargon as 'own resources' (OR). Doing so will be contentious. Since the EU budget last underwent major reform as long as 1988, both the European Commission and the European Parliament have argued persistently for a move away from national contributions to fund EU spending. Instead, they favour revenue sources directly assigned to the supranational level. Just as persistently, the Member States have blocked these demands.

In the initial plans for NGEU, as agreed by the European Council in July 2020, repayments of the loans would have started no sooner than 2028, taken from the annual EU budget and been completed no later than 2058, a very long time. Following negotiations with the Parliament, the start date may be brought forward, although the published agreement is somewhat ambiguous, but the end date remains.

To avoid putting a squeeze on future EU spending programmes, it was also agreed that the repayments would be met by creating new OR. Moreover, the inter-institutional agreement of November 2020 stipulated 'raising an amount through the new own resources that is sufficient to cover the level of overall expected expenditure for the repayment of the principal and the interest of the funds borrowed'.

New OR will, therefore have to be devised, re-opening the longstanding debates on what they should be and how they can be implemented. As a first step, the agreement calls for national contributions to have a component related to unrecycled plastics, to be introduced immediately. But the real battles will be over genuine new OR.

In a next phase, the agreement envisages carbon taxes and a digital levy coming into use in 2023 and calls for other options to be examined, including a financial transactions tax and a corporate tax. Revenue raised from any of these sources will be used to fund general EU spending if it is not needed for NGEU.

The controversy around these proposals is both analytic and political. A first set of problems concerns the characteristics of potential sources of revenue. Part of the rationale for proposals such as carbon taxes is to deter consumption of 'bads', but if this aim is achieved, the revenue raised will fall over time, creating a funding shortfall. Much the same applies to a financial transactions tax, exacerbated by the likelihood that financial innovation will find ways of avoiding the levy.

Then there are distributive considerations. In tax theory, the expectation would be that citizens in equivalent circumstances should make equivalent contributions. But if, for example, countries have very different shares of coal or hydrocarbons in their energy mix, a carbon tax will have an uneven impact across countries. Countries with large shares of nuclear, wind, water or solar in their electricity supply will gain at the expense of those still reliant on coal or gas. While undeniably consistent, with climate change mitigation goals, it will not be easy to sell.

New OR give rise to diverse political challenges, some amplified by the specific context of NGEU as a result of permitting EU level borrowing. Member States anxious to limit the size of EU budgets (including NGEU) tend to be more likely to oppose new resources. Some (notably the so-called 'Frugal 4') will also want to have a system of EU funding compatible with preserving the rebates they currently receive. These are easier to administer by adjusting national contributions.

Previous proposals for new OR were usually framed as being substitutes for national contributions, leaving aggregate taxation unchanged, but repaying NGEU debt manifestly implies an increase in revenue raising. This, too will be politically sensitive, more so because of the likely demands on tax-payers to repair national public finances.

A more fundamental political dilemma is whether the member states are ready to confer a genuine 'power to tax' on the EU level of governance. The Commission and the European are keen and point to the provisions in the treaties about funding the Union through OR. However, taxation is a core function of a state and national parliaments see it as their prerogative to decide how their citizens are taxed, and not a role for 'Brussels'.

In short, expect a divisive and acrimonious process as this dimension of NGEU unfolds.

EU AND THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



Ierotheos Papadopoulos
Head of Representation, European Commission in Cyprus

We have now lived with the virus for a full year and yet, it is too early to say what the impact on our societies has been. This is not just because the pandemic is not over yet – we, in Europe, may be able to see a light at the end of the tunnel by the autumn, but there are parts of the globe where the worse is still to come. It is also because the changes that we have witnessed as a result of the pandemic are profound and we do not have, as yet, the information we need to assess their long term ramifications. For example, will the proliferation of teleworking and distance learning – and the technological advances that were needed to make it possible – revolutionise for ever the way we work and the education of our children? Will the medical breakthroughs that allowed vaccines to be developed at record speeds translate into solutions for other major health problems? Does the rewriting of the EU’s fiscal rulebook – without which we could not have supported businesses, employment and our public health services – mean that financial austerity is now a thing of the past and is Keynesian economics about to become (again) the new orthodoxy? How far will the current, necessary restrictions on civil liberties become embedded in the collective consciousness and be weaved into the fabric of the “new normal” and will they give rise to a backlash of citizens’ revolts that extremists will seek to exploit? And will the global, geopolitical balance of power change depending on which countries and coalitions prove to be the most successful in coping with the pandemic?

But, these questions are not for now, when we are still counting the cost. By the middle of March, the number of Covid-19 related deaths had exceeded 2.6 million worldwide – more than 550,000 people had lost their lives prematurely in the EU.

In economic terms, the global cost is, in effect, incalculable. In January 2021, the World Bank estimated that the world economy probably shrank by 4.3% in 2020, a setback matched only by the Depression and the two world wars. Even this dramatic figure understates the cost since it measures the world economy’s fall from where it was before the pandemic, not from where it would have been had the virus not spread.

In the EU, if we compare where the economy would have been according to the forecasts published by the European Commission in January 2020 to where it actually was last November, we can see that the contraction caused by the pandemic was in the region of 7.5%. It would have been much greater, were it not for the emergency measures that national governments and the European institutions took.

The EU's response to the economic impact of the pandemic has already reached the unprecedented sum of € 3.7 trillion. Emergency liquidity measures taken by national governments under the new, flexible State Aid rules, amount to more than € 2.5 trillion and a further € 500+ billion were spent after the European Commission activated the General Escape Clause in the Growth and Stability Pact. Crisis support from the European Stability Mechanism came to € 240 billion and an additional € 200 billion of financing for businesses was provided by the European Investment Bank. Finally, € 170 billion was provided by the EU itself - € 70 billion in grants from the 2014-2020 Budget and € 100 billion from SURE, the emergency instrument designed to ensure that people stay in jobs. SURE funding has been issued as social bonds to make sure every euro has a clear social impact. Nineteen countries have already received support under this instrument or will in the near future - Cyprus has received € 479 million.

The economic effects of the pandemic will be felt for a long time and that is why the EU is planning for the long term. The 2021-2027 EU Budget amounts to nearly € 1.1 trillion and a further € 750 billion will come from the new Next Generation EU financial instrument. The objective, and the challenge, is to ensure that these funds are put to use not just to aid the recovery but also to lay the foundations of a more resilient, green, digital and socially inclusive European economy.

For the moment, though, the focus remains on health. Researchers funded by the European Commission have been at the vanguard of the amazing advances that have allowed us to have our disposal, just a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, a formidable arsenal of safe and effective vaccines; this is a feat truly unequalled in medical history. For all the criticism it has received, often unfair and sometimes driven by ulterior motives, the European Commission has managed to secure on behalf of the Member States 2.6 billion vaccine doses, with more to come. This is a number sufficient to protect every single person in the EU more than twice over.

We have strong grounds to believe that by the end of the summer 70% of our population will be fully covered. And we have already started thinking ahead. Back in November, President Ursula von der Leyen and Commissioner Stella Kyriakides presented the blueprint for a European Health Union based on two pillars: a stronger health security framework and more robust EU agencies. Through the harmonisation of European, national and regional response plans, through the development, procurement and stockpiling of medical equipment, through the strengthening of the European Centre for

Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency and the establishment of a new Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA incubator), we are ensuring that we will be better prepared for the next emergency. Because the force of the EU lies within the unity of its members. EU: stronger together.

THE NEED FOR CONTINUED EU COORDINATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID 19



*Markos Kyprianou
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of
Cyprus and former EU Commissioner*

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic shocked the whole world. For the Europeans it was a terrifying wake-up call. Aspects of everyday life that had been taken for granted like healthcare, education, entertainment, and socialising suddenly became issues of concern either because they were threatened by the pandemic or affected by the measures taken to deal with it. Basic rights like freedom of movement or freedom of assembly had to be limited or even suspended in the effort to fight the pandemic and the spread of the virus. Businesses and schools had to close. The measures were unprecedented and restrictive, raising a number of practical challenges and legal and ethical questions. And of course one has to add to all these, the disastrous economic impact of the pandemic. As the EU countries are facing a second wave of the pandemic the need to prolong these measures has turned an exhausted society into less obedient and compliant. All hope for returning to normality was placed on mass and speedy vaccinations.

Public health is mostly in the competence of the member states and not of the European Union but the pandemic has raised the issue of the efficacy of actions taken by individual countries and whether the EU Institutions, and in particular the Commission, can effectively coordinate them and act on their behalf at times of health crisis.

It is true that a single country can act and react much quicker than the EU of 27 member states. It is also true that in a time of crisis national governments are under tremendous pressure by their public and their voters to act quickly while the EU institutions are quite remote or even immune from this. This public pressure often makes it very difficult for the member states to wait for the EU to take a collective decision and then implement it. So they act alone. In other words, the EU governments very often face the dilemma: wait for an EU-wide coordinated action which will be more effective but will take longer to materialise, or act on their own which may be somehow inadequate, but can be done immediately and of course be more visible to their citizens.

However, the existence of the single market and the borderless EU means that any unilateral measures by a member state to deal with a health threat will not have the desired effect and outcome. There can never be complete protective “self-isolation” of a member state; not only this will be legally questionable but it will also be practically impossible to achieve. There is so much interdependence among the member states, that a go-it-alone approach is quite ineffective and often causes more problems than it solves. On the contrary, collective action means exploiting to the fullest the benefits and advantages of belonging to a large family of nations. Hence, the need for close coordination and the European Commission is institutionally in the best position to help with this.

In dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic there have been ups and downs in the European reaction. The member states, were taken by surprise by the fast spread of the virus and the devastating effect it was having on their health care systems. When the virus started spreading with terrifying speed the European governments, without waiting for the Commission and in a state of panic, acted individually, sometimes overreacting by closing borders and introducing export controls. There was no coordination among them. This “every man for himself” approach challenged the European solidarity, undermined the authority of the European Institutions and posed a threat to the single market.

Admittedly, the Commission did not react immediately. However, they did eventually take EU-wide initiatives and managed to a great extent to coordinate the member states. The need for collective action to deal with health threats even led to the discussion of expanding the mandate of the EU to include public health, creating a “health union”. And then came the vaccination problems posing a challenge to this effort.

The miscalculation on the part of the Commission of the problems in the production and deliveries of the vaccines and the problems with the purchase contracts had as a result the EU lagging behind its vaccination program. The over-optimistic target to have 70% of the population vaccinated by next summer now seems unattainable. The delay in the vaccination of the broad European public means that, no matter what promises have been made, the economy, markets and society will not return soon to even a semblance of normality. And slower vaccinations mean prolonging the lockdowns and the other measures resulting to an angrier public.

Nevertheless, even if one accepts that the larger or richer member states could probably have done better on their own, the rest of the member states would have been left behind without an EU deal. Despite any setbacks, the majority of the EU has definitely benefited from the collective agreements with the pharmaceutical industries.

My concern, however, is broader than that. My worry is that because of the vaccines' saga the European public and the EU governments may lose faith and trust in the EU Institutions to handle health crises. Regardless of whose fault it is, the fact remains that there are problems in the delivery of the vaccines and that there are delays in the vaccination program of the EU member states; and many EU governments, without any self-criticism of course, blame the Commission for this. Some EU leaders are quite outspoken, others are more discreet, but unquestionably the doubt lingers. A post-Brexit UK having more success in its vaccination effort, creates an unfavourable comparison and offers arguments to the sceptics.

Based on the purchase agreements the EU will eventually receive huge quantities of vaccines, but for now there is a substantial shortage. For the member states it is much more than a logistical issue or a legal dispute with the industry. It means that they will have to continue with the lockdowns and the restrictive measures, not only testing the patience of their citizens but further damaging their economies which will take much longer to recover. The member states have to answer to their public and in desperation are looking outside the EU for solutions to their vaccines' shortages, for example to Russia, China or Israel. This, even if understandable, nevertheless undermines the European solidarity and coherence, and will be in the long-term damaging.

Despite all these and in view of the realities of the EU, there are great advantages when there is coordinated action and the member states act as one entity. And there is clear added value when the Commission leads this effort. Therefore, it is important for the Commission and the EU Institutions to gain back the trust of the member states and more importantly of the EU citizens. They should not insist on a defensive approach but rather identify and acknowledge any weaknesses there may have been or even mistakes made, and make sure that these will be avoided in the future. It will also be constructive for the member states to go through the same exercise for their own responsibilities on this issue. It will be a disappointing step backwards if the member states choose again to deal with health threats individually in an isolated manner. It will be the wrong lesson to be drawn from the pandemic.

One final comment regarding the pressure on the EMA to speed up its approval process for new vaccines. I disagree. The diligent approval process by the EMA is correct. Not only for health and safety reasons but also in view of the anti-vaccine sentiment that unfortunately exists among the Europeans. The thoroughness of the EMA is important for the EU citizens so they can trust the vaccines. I hope that this prudent approach will not change under political pressure for faster approvals.

The solution for more vaccines and for quicker vaccinations is not to lower our standards, but for the EU to invest more on the production infrastructure and for the member states to strengthen their capacity to vaccinate in large numbers; and of course to have solid purchase agreements.

COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES: EU'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



*Loucas Furlas
Member of the European Parliament
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The COVID-19 outbreak was an unprecedented shock to the European economy and society. It is unquestionable that the pandemic has affected societies and economies at their core. The devastating consequences for Cyprus, for Europe and its citizens are still ongoing. We need to admit that at the beginning of the pandemic crisis, Member States could have coordinated better because health threats do not respect borders. Nevertheless, after the first shock, Europe responded to an unprecedented crisis in an unprecedented way. European Union set as a main priority to safeguard the health and well-being of Europeans by mobilizing all available resources at our disposal to help Member States with an aid package of € 2.4 trillion as loans and grants.

The current Environment Action Plan provides guidelines for the European Environment Policy. It sets out a vision and specific goals to be achieved by 2050: living in an environment of zero waste, sustainable management of natural resources, protection and restoration of biodiversity. The scheme focuses on protecting, preserving and strengthening the EU's natural capital, transforming the EU into a green and competitive economy with low carbon emissions and rational use of national resources and protecting EU citizens against environmental pressures and risks, their health and their well-being as well. The plan will ensure building better resilience to future pandemics.

I do not want to make things look perfect. In terms of communication, Europe could have reacted better on misinformation and disinformation actions. The EU and its Member States have made a tremendous effort to limit the spread of the virus and to support the national healthcare systems.

We also need to stress that vaccine development is a complex and long process that usually lasts 10 years to 15 years. It is a success for humanity the fact that after only one year since the beginning of the pandemic, we already have safe and effective vaccines in Europe and vaccination has begun. We should not forget the EU has invested 2.7 billion EUR in companies, allowing them to build the production processes and start stockpiling vaccines.

The European Commission has presented a European strategy to accelerate the development, manufacture and distribution of pandemic vaccines. An effective and safe vaccine against the virus would be the best means of definitive tackling the pandemic. As part of this strategy, the Commission has supported the efforts to accelerate the development and availability of safe and effective vaccines. For this reason, we already have three approved vaccines.

Undoubtedly, the economic and psychological consequences of the pandemic are enormous and it will take time for them to heal. The pandemic has clearly shown that the world was not prepared for an unsparing pandemic, which took so many lives, devastated one nation after the other and stole hopes, in particular from the youth.

Businesses have closed and people found themselves in financial trouble and uncertainty on their future. The Union is accused for doing “so little-so late”. However, blame game is not needed right now. What we urgently need is a more coordinated European response. The Union understands and is aware of the problems of its citizens.

In a spirit of solidarity, determination and cooperation, the Commission has decided to support the EU Member States through a Recovery Fund for the period 2021-27, with an additional budget of 750 billion euros. Cyprus will receive €1.45 billion in grants and €2.7 billion from the Commission Recovery Fund.

Regarding the delays, in order to ensure the approval of the introduction and distribution of any vaccine, exhaustive checks and inspections are carrying out by the competent bodies of the Union. We would not supply our citizens with something we are not sure about. There were mistakes or possibly delay. The economic consequences of the pandemic are enormous for both citizens and governments.

Despite the consequences, today, we can speak with confidence and hope for better days. With an eye in the future having vaccines in our hands. What clearly stands out, one year since the outbreak pandemic, is the vaccination of citizens.

Another point, which is of utmost importance, is the solidarity that we need to show to our partners across the world. This is also a matter of stopping the spread of the virus. The access to vaccines for low- and middle-income countries is therefore an action of showing a de facto solidarity. For that reason, EU invest already €1 billion to COVAX global initiative in order to ensure safe and effective vaccines for low and middle-income countries.

To prepare Europe for an increased threat of coronavirus variants we started the European bio-defence preparedness plan called “HERA Incubator”. The Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) Incubator will bring together science, industry and public authorities, and leverage all available resources to enable Europe to respond to this challenge.

Together we can overcome the challenges.

IT IS HIGH TIME FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION TO CHANGE AND LEAD BY EXAMPLE, STARTING FIRST AT HOME...



*Giorgos Georgiou
Member of the European Parliament
The Left Group in the European Parliament*

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed our lives over the last year as well as the way we perceive the world. Notwithstanding the present grave challenges posed by the climatic change, its socio-economic and political challenges are unprecedented. We are facing a historical health crisis, which paves the way to a profound socioeconomic crisis. The idea that once we “recover” from the crisis we will get back to our “old normality” is somehow misleading. The fact of the matter is that we will need to construct a new normality.

We need to transform our economic system basing it on solidarity, social justice, social inclusion and climate sustainability. Any transformation of this magnitude should not be left to “market mechanisms”. The pandemic has exemplified how these market mechanisms crippled our ability/capacity to manage the crisis, hence exacerbating and prolonging its disastrous effect on people.

Privatization of the public healthcare systems for profit

Over the past decade, Brussels repeatedly demanded that member states drastically cut public health spending and privatize their public health system. With the successive neoliberal policies imposed, the fundamental right to healthcare has become a commodity. Public hospitals have been left understaffed with severe shortages in equipment and consumables, while the labor rights of medical and paramedical staff have been relentlessly violated. As a result, the entire public health system has been bled dry. We have all seen the tragic results of these policies...

Even under these dire circumstances however, the public sector rose to the occasion. It is obvious that the only way to fight global epidemics is by strengthening the public healthcare systems by substantial increases in government funding and investment.

Furthermore, national governments are responsible for organizing and ensuring health care, but the EU has a responsibility to complement national policies, assisting member states to achieve higher levels of quality health care for all. That is precisely why today the peoples and member states demand the support and solidarity in practice of the EU, so that they can confront the pandemic, as well as the effects of the policies that the EU itself has imposed on the public health system. Nevertheless, the EU continues to be absent...to the extent that it is again proposing a reduction in the funding for the new 'EU-4-HEALTH' program! Allocating just 5.1 billion from the 9.4 billion allocated for the period 2021-27.

Deregulation of labor relations

The COVID-19 pandemic and the declaration of a "state of emergency" have represented a golden opportunity for all those who for years have been seeking to impose the full deregulation of labor relations, the reduction of labor costs and introduction of new 'flexible' forms of work, such as teleworking. AKEL, together with the Group of the European United Left in the European Parliament, has long been warning about the dangers looming from these policies.

Despite the fact that teleworking was a necessary measure for people's protection against the coronavirus, thousands of teleworkers have suffered in a particularly forceful and dramatic way its impact. Initially, employers seized the opportunity to intensify work, extend working hours/working days, abolish overtime pay and reduce absences due to illness or other factors. Subsequently, the maintenance of the facilities and various operating expenses of the employer shifted on to the backs of working people. Apart from the economic cost, the effects of teleworking on workers' health, both physical and mental, have been equally painful. Women in particular have suffered an additional burden, as they had to combine teleworking along with raising their families, thus intensifying gender inequality.

As the Group of the European United Left, we are working hard to consolidate collective bargaining agreements, abolish flexible employment, and ensure fair/viable working hours.

Vaccination program of the European Union

Despite the assurances for a speedy and comprehensive vaccination program across the EU by the end of 2020, we are still awaiting for its implementation. The EU seems to be trapped in agreements that it itself concluded with the big pharmaceutical companies. Resulting in delays and serious shortages among member states while forcing some to proceed unilaterally with separate agreements with the pharmaceutical companies outside the

framework set out by the EU. Such a development undermines solidarity between EU member states and legitimizes “vaccine nationalism”...

Furthermore, the procedure followed by the Commission to buy the vaccines raises serious concerns for transparency since all contracts made public by the Commission are heavily redacted (no information on prices, delivery schedules, important clauses that relieve the pharmaceuticals of their responsibilities etc.)...

The pandemic has laid bare the disastrous consequences of decades of neoliberal economic policies that led to privatizations and the destruction of the welfare state. Growing economic inequalities will worsen paving the way to more political gains by the extreme right and the populists. It is imperative to avoid mistakes of the past. Focusing instead on the need to introduce a fair, sustainable and inclusive growth model that will effectively address the pandemic crisis, the climate crisis and respond to the increased economic, social, territorial, digital and demographic inequalities and challenges. Tackling at the same time the huge levels of tax evasion and tax avoidance by the economic elites. Only then, we can construct a European project that respects territorial, social and economic cohesion.

During last November’s II plenary session, the European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on the foreign policy consequences of the pandemic. The report considers the pandemic a 'game changer' in the international environment, a risk multiplier and a catalyst of change in the global order. According to it, in the post-Covid world, the EU will need to change its foreign and security policy with a view to making it proactive, stronger and more effective common foreign and security policy. The EU should 'lead by example' and play a stronger role in defending and rebuilding a fairer multilateral order...

It is high time for the European Union to change and lead by example, starting first at home...

THE EU RESPONSE TO THE COVID CRISIS: A HISTORICAL STEP TOWARDS MORE INTEGRATION



*Niyazi Kizilyürek
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The dramatic death toll of the COVID pandemic, the disastrous effects on our fellow citizens working in sectors such as tourism or culture, the closure of thousands small businesses and the excessive police brutality shown in some member states has undoubtedly put both the EU and its Member States to another hard test (the first being the failure to socially address the Euro crisis). Nevertheless, (and despite the flaws of which I will present below) I argue that the EU's reaction to the pandemic can be seen as a shock, which created a historical step forward towards the unions' integration process. For the first time in its history, the EU is presenting itself as a single entity in the stock markets, overcoming its loose trade-based-cooperation character. Undoubtedly, the union needs to overcome the lack of solidarity shown by some member states and the member states need to overcome national egoisms. At the same time the EU needs to be more transparent and enforce democratic accountability. However, the pandemic can be seen as the external factor that shocked the union and pushed it a step closer to integration.

At the beginning of the pandemic the EU had a very uncoordinated response to the crisis. Member states adopted lockdowns on a different scale, Italy was practically left alone to cope with the first wave, and Member States even closed their borders in an effort to cope with the crisis. After several months into the crisis and during the Council discussions on the Next Generation EU the frugal 4 showed an unprecedented unwillingness to "bend" their financial orthodoxy for the sake of humanity and solidarity. Other member states used (and still use) the pandemic to further attack on social and human rights - including the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Nevertheless, the political impact of the crisis has other facets too. Its influence on the EU integration is a substantial one. In the eve of the "Conference on the Future of Europe" taking place in May, and despite Brexit, the EU managed to reach historical compromises on the Next Generation EU (which is part of the Recovery Plan for Europe and it includes the mechanism on the rule of law).

The Next Generation EU will grant the Member States 312,5 billion euros, while another 360 billion euros will be taken as loans by the Member States. For the first time in the Union's history, it will give grants to its member states and manage a common debt, while the Commission is authorized to borrow on the capital markets on behalf of the Union.

We certainly do not argue that all EU responses to the crisis have been a success. For one, the Rule of Law Mechanism will be activated in three years—namely after the current government's term in Hungary. Furthermore, the culture and arts sectors were supported as little as any other sector during the pandemic. The continuous cuts proposed by the Council on budgets for Culture and Education, as well the fact that this Commission does not have a Commissioner for Education and Culture for the first time since 1999 shows the priorities taken by the two institutions. Finally yet importantly, the scandals with vaccine deals and vaccine distribution are another example of supporting national interests and the interests of the pharmaceutical sector at the expense of EU citizen's health. Indeed, the shady deals and contracts made by the Commission with big pharma companies undermine both Democracy and transparency.

Yet again, EU's reaction on the pandemic has been totally different to its reaction to the economic crisis of 2008. The differences of the Next Generation EU to the European Stability Mechanism which was used in the 2008 crisis are apparent: The Commission will be borrowing 312,5 billion euros for grants to the member states. In 2008 the union would impose Memoranda of Understanding to member states in exchange of loans. This change of paradigm coming out of the EU's need to respond to the COVID pandemic can be seen as a shock which created a historical step forward towards the unions' integration process.

THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPACT OF COVID 19 AND THE RESPONSE OF THE EU: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT



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The COVID-19 pandemic hit the whole humanity at unprecedented levels. It created distress across the entire EU and generated a crisis with serious economic, social and political implications.

The Member States that were faced with the first wave of COVID-19 believed that they would emerge faster from the crisis. But, contrariwise, this crisis lasts longer thus forcing all countries to adapt their policies according to the economic support that they are receiving. It is true that the money that is spent is much more than the initial budget. Bold decisions are clearly required for the recovery of the economy.

As far as the vaccine is concerned, we have to highlight that this was circulated quite early, within 10 months, against all odds. It is essential now to ensure that vaccines will be efficiently distributed in order things to return to normal as soon as possible. At this point there is no room for national egoisms vis-à-vis the delivery of the vaccines. There will be fast-spreading variants of the COVID-19 virus in case a harmonised strategy and a global alliance against COVID-19 is not implemented.

The European Union, after long and tough discussions- and compromises as well- adopted measures to combat the pandemic and address the economic consequences. The initial management of the COVID-19 crisis on behalf of the European Union turned out to be weak mainly because, as I already mentioned, the national self-interests seem to dominate the European response. This can also be explained by the fact that under the Treaties, the primary responsibility for health protection and, in particular, healthcare systems continues to lie with the Member States. Nevertheless, the European Commission could have shown better reflexes for a coordinated and consolidated response to the pandemic since the first phase of the virus.

One year after the pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) EU came forward with a wide range of measures and a plan including massive investments to support people and businesses as Europe battles a

deep economic recession due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Last February, in the European Parliament, we approved the rules establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the flagship €750 billion EU programme to support reforms needed to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the pandemic and to prepare the EU economies for a sustainable, digital future.

Moreover, specific measures have been taken for the reinforcement of the Member States' healthcare systems thus building resilience and preparedness for future crisis. But it is certainly proven, and I say this as a Socialist, that national healthcare systems are the flagship of the healthcare systems. The absolute privatization of health systems cannot be efficient and neither societies can be benefited from. This is a clear response to the extreme neoliberals.

Regarding the socioeconomic and political consequences of COVID-19, I believe it is still early to make a thorough assessment. We need first to return to normalcy so that we can fully comprehend the magnitude of the consequences and the disaster due to the pandemic. However, I estimate that it is the Member States of the South in particular that have been hit hardest if we consider that the tourism sector is an important part of their GDP.

In addition, the European Commission should not enter into harsh monetary surveillance in the next period. There must be a relaxation and a margin for recovery otherwise we will sink into a worse recession, as it happened in the case of the Greek Memorandum, where since 2010 Greece has not really emerged from the crisis.

I would also like to point out that there has been a clear loss of citizens' rights based on the emergency measures implemented by Member State. There was a restriction of fundamental rights like the freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and of association, even freedom of expression in some Member States on the pretext of fighting disinformation.

We need to ensure that any emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary and strictly proportionate. They must not last indefinitely thus further restricting citizens' rights in the name of the pandemic especially when taking into consideration the fact that some countries are facing a second or third wave of COVID-19 and lockdowns.

Everyone must contribute in a constructive way in order to get out of the crisis as soon as possible-even if that implies that we give up some of our usual habits- by showing social responsibility.

In conclusion, I would like to convey a positive message by saying that despite current challenges, the COVID-19 crisis presents an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the EU. It brought in light the need to strengthen EU's

health capacity and therefore it put forward the new health programme EU4Health to tackle cross-border health threats. With the new ways of working and communicating (teleworking, remote learning) there is an opportunity to upgrade citizens' digital skills to reduce the digital skills gap. Also in a time when governments are allocating massive resources to alleviate the economic and social impact of COVID-19, it is essential to seize the opportunities offered by gearing the European Recovery Funds towards a circular and climate-neutral economy.

FROM 'MASK DIPLOMACY' TO 'VACCINE DIPLOMACY': A NEW COLD WAR OVER EUROPE?



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As the COVID-19 outbreak was taking the world by storm at around this time last year, the epicentre of the pandemic was also rapidly shifting, at the same time, from China to Europe. China – that had already attained control over the virus domestically – was beginning to assume an important role as the main exporter of critical medical supplies, such as face masks and disinfectants, mainly to Europe. This sparked a debate about whether medical goods were being turned into propaganda campaign tools and about the new role that 'mask diplomacy' would play in the COVID era, as well as its wider effects on the geopolitics of the region.

In an op-ed published on euractiv.com on 26 Mar 2020, the Head of the Chinese Mission to the EU, Zhang Ming, stated that, the fight against the virus had nothing to do with the social system or geopolitics: "*To politicise the outbreak or view China's efforts with suspicion is nothing but parochial and detrimental. When people's lives and health are at stake, the only right thing to do is to put politics and prejudice aside and join the global fight against the virus.*" 12 months on, however, and the 'politicisation' of the pandemic still seems to be very much the case. Except now the focus is no longer on masks, but on vaccines.

The Chinese government opposes the term 'vaccine diplomacy', arguing that it is the duty of any responsible great power to distribute essential goods at a time of crisis. As the country's President, Xi Jinping, stated last May, Chinese COVID vaccines should become a "*global public good.*" It is by no means surprising that French President Emmanuel Macron, warned in early February that Beijing's clear diplomatic successes in producing and exporting doses of vaccines globally could be seen as "*a little bit humiliating for us [West].*"

How can a bloc that for months keeps proving unable to secure enough vaccines for its citizens, play a key role as a geopolitical actor? It was indeed inevitable that, at some stage, a geopolitical power-game revolving around the COVID vaccines would start to emerge in the EU. And there were fears amongst many member states and EU diplomats that an approval of the

Russian Sputnik V would be a major geopolitical win for President Vladimir Putin. This 'challenge' reached its peak at the time of the poisoning and imprisonment of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, which led to new tensions between EU and Moscow and even the possibility of sanctions. Moreover, both Russia and China have been repeatedly criticised by the EU over their lack of transparency when it comes to their vaccines. Many in the EU have openly doubted whether Sputnik and Sinopharm manufacturers are adopting common standards, as details on their vaccination are less available than those from western drug manufacturers. In early February in fact, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, urged Russia and China to show all their data if they want their vaccines to be approved in the EU.

On its own part, the EU's vaccine purchasing record has so far been a disaster. On 10 February, von der Leyen acknowledged the EU's vaccine rollout failures, stating: *"We were late to authorise. We were too optimistic when it came to massive production and perhaps too confident that what we ordered would actually be delivered on time."* The main failure of the Union was that of timely action. As AstraZeneca characteristically noted on the issue, the fact that EU contracts were signed later than with the UK, caused problems with supplying their vaccine.

With successive EU failures to strike speedy deals that would provide EU citizens with sufficient doses of 'western' vaccines, member states have been on the look-out for national policies and unilateral procurements as far as vaccine purchases are concerned. For the history, in June 2020, all 27 member states joined a scheme that gave the EU central responsibility for buying vaccines. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has given, over the past months, authorisation to three vaccines that are currently available: Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford/AstraZeneca and Moderna. Member states are allowed to strike separate deals with vaccine manufacturers that have not signed agreements with the EU, while under the terms of the EU scheme, member states are not allowed to strike deals with any vaccine manufacturer with whom the EU already has an agreement.

On 4 March, Austria and Denmark announced they were joining forces with Israel in the fight against COVID-19, with an investment in research to produce second-generation vaccines against mutations of the virus. In a statement, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, said: *"This pandemic can only be overcome through global cooperation."* Russia and China have also been fast in trying to fill the vaccine vacuum caused by EU failures. Hungary was the first member state to roll-out Russia's Sputnik in February, by buying two million doses from Moscow, while also granting approval to a Chinese vaccine, with Slovakia following suit. This has undermined cooperation and put the EU's unity under pressure. In February, while awaiting delayed EU-procured vaccines, the Czech President Miloš Zeman, stated that his country may roll-out Sputnik if it gets authorisation from the domestic medical regulator. He

remarked that "*vaccines have no ideology.*" Quite an unfortunate remark by the Czech President, one could argue, that was – quite ironically – made while awaiting authorisation for a vaccine that, not by coincidence, carries the name of the first artificial Earth satellite launched in 1957 by the Soviet Union, whose unanticipated success essentially triggered the Cold War Space Race.

BETTER TOGETHER IN THE EU WHEN DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Andreas Kettis
Head of the European Parliament Office in Cyprus

What we have experienced this past year has been a turning point on all fronts - political, economic as well as societal. There is so much unknown and still more to learn from the pandemic. However, what is certain is that we are facing more than just a health crisis. The socially agreed norms our world order runs by have faced a great shock and since the initial begins of the virus, attitudes in Europe have seen a pronounced shift. This shift not only conditions our health protocols and social interaction, but has significant consequence on our political and economic patterns as well.

As Head of the EPLO office in Cyprus, I am very familiar with the 'overnight' changes the Union has gone through in order to prioritise health, safety and unity. Internal amendments and additions, including budgetary changes, have been at the forefront of our agenda. Despite the isolationist characteristics of the pandemic, a unionist approach seems to champion the EU's strategy. From a socioeconomic perspective, the impact of the virus is devastating. With unemployment rising to an all-time high, the need for alternative support systems is more pressing than ever. In response to this urgency, the EU introduced their new financial instrument, 'Next Generation EU' - a recovery plan hoping to alleviate some the economic pain. Consisting of mostly grants as well as low interest loans, 'Next Generation EU' aims to inject fuel back into the market, starting with €750 billion. The main idea behind this 7-year recovery venture (2021-2027) is to support future generations and champion public investment, ensuring that the allocation of funds will target member states that are most in need. Besides, the aim is to turn this crisis into an opportunity and help member states to make the necessary investments that will facilitate their green and digital transitions.

Viewing the economic actions taken by the Union from a political lens, the European body is experiencing changes never seen before. Some can say the EU has pulled a 'Sinatra' in regards to the Commission and Parliament's finances. A once financially divided Union now demonstrates signs of federal tendencies where a mutualisation of debt has been advocated by both EU

bodies. This subtle 'federalised' move truly shows that the EU did it its own way...

As clearly portrayed during the plenary of the European Parliament in February 2021, the political group leaders have been advocating for a united front - with the idea being 'we can tackle the crisis better if we stick together'. This unity has also cast its shadow on the topic of the vaccination strategy. The untied attitude displayed by the EU member states have great benefits particularly for smaller member states like Malta and Cyprus. Had there not been an inclusive front, such countries undoubtedly would have experienced greater difficulties in procuring vaccines - both in terms of quantity and urgency. This unity and consideration for all member states will help the EU surface with stronger internal ties, economically and politically. Nevertheless, the question remains - could we have acted better? The answer is (and should always be) yes, since we learn from our experiences and aim for better practices. Yet, considering the unexpected nature of this pandemic, the steps taken by the EU are as reputable as any other leading institution. We have drawn a new road map considering the unforeseen obstacles placed in the way.

The repercussions of this pandemic will echo on for years to come. However, along with its hardships, I believe this extraordinary situation has opened doors for the revision of existing research. Aside from studies focusing on health, issues concerning crisis management, contemporary methods of post-crisis policymaking and the growing symptoms of de-globalization have potential for new findings. At this point I would like to quote the words of David Sassoli, the President of the European Parliament when he addressed the members of the European Council on 25 February 2021: "The lesson the pandemic has taught us is that there can be no return to how things were before. It would be a mistake, a waste of energy, and it would leave us ill-equipped to address future challenges. Our task now is to develop a European health policy, by allocating clearly defined competences to the EU institutions. Modifying the Treaties to incorporate the provisions we need and guaranteeing the effectiveness of the European response can no longer be a taboo".

I would like to conclude with an optimistic message. The EU is a unique and enviable model worldwide of regional cooperation, freedom, democracy and political and social rights. We European citizens must be proud of what has been achieved on our continent in the course of history and the political developments towards political unification and economic integration. Without a doubt, we live today, because of the existence of the EU, in a Europe of unparalleled cultural diversity and in conditions of strict adherence to the rule of law and human rights. It is up to us to preserve this European acquis and to resist the dangerous populist and nationalist ideologies that tend to find fertile ground in times of crisis, such as the current crisis of the coronavirus

pandemic. Let us never forget that we have a duty to defend democracy every day!

COMMON PROCUREMENT OF VACCINES AS AN EXERCISE IN EU GOVERNANCE



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Analysis and comment on the coronavirus pandemic, as it unfolds, are mushrooming. Beyond scientific / medical research which naturally dominated interest in the early phases of the pandemic, political, economic, social, psychological as well as international / geopolitical considerations increasingly become more relevant in the public debate. EU action is often addressed in discussions, controversy and criticism in the member states. Until summer the focus was on the Recovery plan with the mode of financing, the total amount, the sectoral allocation and rule of law conditionality being the most important questions. Excessive dependence on global supply chains, especially in the medical sector, and strategies for achieving autonomy at the EU level (through diversification, shorter distances and industrial policy) became more relevant later in 2020. At the turn of the year, with the start of the EU-wide vaccination campaign and the expected shortage of doses for several months, public attention turned to the decision for common procurement and the management of the process by the European Commission. In this article we discuss the latter aspect trying to understand EU governance and possible lessons for the future.

The attempt by the then US President Trump in May 2020 to buy a promising German biotech company (CureVac) for the exclusive use in the US seems to have alarmed member states. Four of them (Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands) formed an Inclusive Vaccine Alliance; as other countries complained the Commission proposed and convinced all member states to adopt a common approach, making procurement a collective endeavour. By mid-June this was agreed and negotiations with companies pursuing promising research projects could start. In the following months first agreements were concluded as research was progressing; the breakthrough came in November by BioNTech/Pfizer, followed by Moderna and AstraZeneca.

For the EU negotiations an ad hoc structure was used consisting of a steering committee, in which all member states are represented, a negotiation team with the participation of seven member states having sizeable industrial

capacity, and a scientific advisory group. Since member states were fully involved in the process at all stages any ex-post criticism is not justified. Vaccination is the responsibility of member states; indeed, the campaigns were designed and implemented in various ways. When vaccination started, the three companies announced one after the other that production delays would result in delivering fewer doses than initially foreseen. These delays caused disappointment and criticism, particularly as EU countries made a slow start in comparison to fast progress in the UK, the US and in Israel.¹ While disappointment is understandable, the population being anxious to see the end of repeated lockdowns and various restrictions, it is important to assess the issue on the basis of solid criteria rather than impressions, and to avoid the usual blame game.

Among these criteria speed deserves special attention. The Commission has been criticised for having concluded contracts later than others. This argument was used by AstraZeneca to justify priority deliveries to countries outside the EU. However, what counts are contractual obligations and not the timing of contracts; actually, the UK signed its contract one day after the EU.² With respect to the authorisation by the competent institutions (the European Medical Agency issuing a scientific recommendation and the Commission authorising the circulation in the internal market), EMA issued its recommendations three or four weeks later than the UK authority; the latter used the emergency procedure implying liability for the British government, while EMA followed the conditional procedure which means that product liability lays with the companies.³ The conditional procedure also served the purpose of strengthening popular trust in the proposed vaccines and their acceptance.

Several tens of research projects for vaccines being underway in summer 2020, with uncertain prospects for success, the best strategy was one of diversification to minimise risk of failure. The EU negotiated a portfolio of six vaccines based on different technologies; the three mentioned above have been authorised in the meantime and are now in use; that of Johnson & Johnson was authorised on 11 March, and CureVac is expected to follow before summer. The US negotiated a portfolio of nine different vaccines, including the six retained by the EU. The US invested 10 billion USD compared to EUR 2.3 billion (3 billion USD) by the EU.^{4 5}

¹ [Vaccins contre le Covid-19: dans les coulisses des contrats entre l'UE et les groupes pharmaceutiques \(lemonde.fr\)](https://www.lemonde.fr/santitech/article/2020/03/11/vaccins-contre-le-covid-19-dans-les-coulisses-des-contrats-entre-l-ue-et-les-groupes-pharmaceutiques_6058812_1881.html)

² [Analysis: Two contracts, lots of questions and not nearly enough vaccines...: Europost](https://www.europost.eu/analysis/two-contracts-lots-of-questions-and-not-nearly-enough-vaccines...)
In the EU contract the time schedule for deliveries is apparently not sufficiently precise.

³ Member states were free to opt nationally for the emergency procedure; none did.

⁴ [Terra Nova | Production des vaccins : quels enseignements tirer de l'expérience COVID? \(tnova.fr\)](https://www.tnova.fr/en/production-des-vaccins-quel-enseignement-tirer-de-l-experience-covid/)

⁵ [Emergency Support Instrument | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-press/en/emergency-support-instrument)

According to press reports, EU contracts were delayed because European negotiators insisted on lower prices and stricter liability conditions for the industry, the US having set a precedent more favourable for the companies. The price initially asked by Pfizer/BioNTech was EUR 54 per dose; the price agreed was EUR 15.5, lower than that paid by the US.⁶ But the relevance of the price variable can be questioned seen the huge human and economic costs caused by the pandemic and related restrictions.⁷ A further criterion seems to have been local production capacities. Doubts about the reliability of deliveries led the Commission introduce end January 2021 a specific notification scheme for exports outside the EU;⁸ so far export of vaccines has been denied only once. This compares with the UK and the US having imposed de facto a ban on the export of vaccines or ingredients produced on their territory.⁹

The EU has fully supported the multilateral system to cope with the pandemic and has launched the international initiative COVAX to supply vaccines to lower income countries, committing, together with the member states, EUR 2.7 billion which represents currently 25 % of total funding. The EU has pre-ordered over two billion doses, more than double what is needed to vaccinate its population. The surplus will be given to partner countries, making it possible to vaccinate several hundreds of millions of people around the world. A sign of solidarity, this also reflects enlightened self-interest as global communications would be affected and new mutations occur as long as the virus continues circulating. No doubt acting collectively at international level serves the interests of EU citizens.

In principle, member states receive vaccine doses pro rata of their population;¹⁰ they are free to use other vaccines in addition to those procured collectively; some have decided to use vaccines coming from China or Russia;¹¹ others have sought international cooperation aimed at research and production of vaccines to fight new waves and variants. Beyond short term production and delivery problems, we should not lose sight of the long-term requirement to invest in pharmaceutical research and industrial capacity, as well as in better preparedness for future crises. These considerations led the

⁶ [Corona-Impfstoff: Biontech wollte 54,08 Euro für eine Dosis - Politik - SZ.de \(sueddeutsche.de\)](https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/corona-impfstoff-biontech-wollte-54-08-euro-fuer-eine-dosis-1.5000000)

⁷ [Vaccination delay to cost Europe EUR90bn in 2021 \(allianz.com\)](https://www.allianz.com/en/press-releases/2021/01/vaccination-delay-to-cost-europe-eur90bn-in-2021)

⁸ [EUR-Lex - 32021R0111 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R0111)

⁹

<https://nsl.consilium.europa.eu/104100/GeneralNewsletter/4od5l4siyvf7z5zx5ai27sxp5i/Html>

¹⁰ This initial Commission proposal was modified at the request of member states to allow flexibility for the choice of individual vaccines; recently some countries asked to revert to the proportional distribution.

¹¹ EMA has recently initiated the procedure for the authorisation of Sputnik-V.

Commission propose creating HERA (Health Emergency Response Authority).¹² This is part of the broader project for a European Health Union.¹³

EU governance must, beyond effectiveness in delivering public goods, also respond to basic democratic requirements. The European Parliament insisted on, and obtained, the publication of the procurement contracts (which is not the case for other countries). Furthermore, the EP convened the CEOs of pharma companies for a hearing to clarify matters, demonstrating its resolve for transparency and accountability.¹⁴ In a democratic system public opinion matters, hence the importance of communication; bad press tends to undermine popular support for measures taken at the political level. The EU must be more attentive to these aspects, not neglecting proper communication neither creating too high expectations which might backfire; this seems to have happened at the start of the vaccination campaign according to the Vice-President of the steering committee.¹⁵

Addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic proved a difficult exercise for public policy everywhere; communication with citizens remains a formidable challenge. Despite health being primarily a national competence, the EU system demonstrated flexibility using traditional and novel instruments to cope with an emergency characterised by many unknowns, uncertainty and volatility. The collective procurement of vaccines (and other material) was the right decision to make; still, the structure and functioning of the three committees should be reviewed with a view to ensuring agility and rapidity. Delays in the delivery of vaccines were mainly due to technical production problems not anticipated by the pharma companies. The EU must draw lessons with respect to pharmaceutical research and industrial capacities to enhance its strategic autonomy; and for better preparedness in crisis situations.

¹² [COM\(2021\)78/F1 - EN \(europa.eu\)](#)

HERA is similar to the US BARDA, Bio-medical Advanced Research and Development Authority.

¹³ [Public health | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁴ [COVID-19: MEPs discuss ways to increase roll-out of vaccines with pharma CEOs | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁵ [Corona-Impfung: „Da sind eben zu hohe Erwartungen geweckt worden“ - Politik - SZ.de \(sueddeutsche.de\)](#)

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: WHAT NEXT?



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A glance at the economic measures adopted by the EU member states in 2020 to contain the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, shows some marked differences and contrasts as well as common approaches. After all they had to respond at one and the same time both to similar situations as well as particular ones, peculiar to their individual national context.

This is when you begin to bless the nation-state as a political organization with control over the national territory and the knowledge of what is best for the citizens living within the physical space under its governance. However, any exaggeration of the capabilities of the European nation-state beyond a certain point is dangerous. The pandemic has shown what is lacking in this respect and what can be done to fill the policy gaps: we require better Union instruments to help states deal with challenges that easily dwarf their individual resources, but not their collective ones.

The stimulus packages which the EU member states applied in their national contexts were intended to address their immediate concerns, to prevent businesses from drowning and unemployment from touching unheard of peaks, to slow the descent of the poorer strata of society further into the abyss. No one had any illusions: they were not intended to keep everything as it was before the pandemic struck, but to ensure that an inevitable decline would not gallop away and increase the misery.

The pandemic is still raging and before a substantive share of the EU's population has been vaccinated it is unlikely to slow down. This is in my view the absolute priority for an economic rebirth.

The launching of an EU stimulus package of almost €1.8 trillion is a sign of the realization and appreciation that there is a level of action which only a united European effort can address. The package symbolises our collective "Le-shanah ha-ba-a b'Yerushalayim". But crucial it is the member states' governments that have to implement the measures in their national contexts.

The EU's stimulus package joins the one which has been rolled out on the other side of the Atlantic. The rhetoric surrounding both packages is different, in substance they employ almost identical methods. The 1.9 trillion dollar USA program targets businesses, but it also seeks to confront inequality and help those social strata which have been most badly hit. It reflects the values of the Democratic Party that markets on their own will not ensure justice and fairness. Some studies have suggested that as a result of the package, American economic growth may outpace China's.

The EU's package consists of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework or long term budget together with the temporary NextGenerationEU, a total of €1.8 trillion which will be dedicated towards the building of "a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe." The funds will be aimed at those economic sectors which had been identified before the outbreak of the pandemic as the main engines of growth and the achievement of the Union's long-term future. This ties well with the Union's ambitious plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

I am concerned as to whether serious efforts will be made to ensure fair distribution of the gains which will ensue from the projected economic growth. I cannot really shake off the conclusions in a report by the Swiss Bank UBS which revealed that the pandemic has not been catastrophic for all: in between April and July 2020, the wealthiest of the earth managed to increase their worth by around 28% while ordinary citizens employed in such sectors as tourism and manufacturing lost their jobs, or had to face drastic pay cuts, forced leave, evictions from their homes and crowded hospitals. Health budgets in the EU have not increased since the financial crisis and in any case most of them were not prepared for the onslaught. The estimated 2.7 million (Johns Hopkins University statistics) who died in the world so far as a result of the pandemic have no voice and most of them lie in make-shift graves and cannot join the debate on what needs to be done.

My second preoccupation concerns our post-pandemic health systems. Everyone is talking about the need to strengthen our resilience to similar events which we are likely to face in the future. Our health services and research institutions are crucial in this effort. They are also of central importance in the redistribution of surpluses, to provide a public good that improves the welfare of ordinary citizens. Health systems will also have to face the post-pandemic pressures arising from long-postponed medical examinations and procedures as well as the long-term effects of COVID-19 on those who survived it. I have read estimates ranging from two to more years for our national health systems to regain some balance.

The third challenge concerns the EU: should we have more or less Europe in the health sector which so far has been designated as primarily a national competence? My view on this is mixed: it is a "yes" for more Europe, but with

serious qualifications. In theory national competence is necessary for the good management of health services and outreach, except in situations of incompetent governments which bungle almost everything. But the EU can be useful in communicating best practice and ensuring more European cooperation especially when the whole weight of the scientific community needs to be brought into play in the service of all the peoples of Europe. In promoting the patients' charter, in campaigns such as Europe against Cancer and raising awareness about obesity and the abuse of anti-biotics, narcotics and tobacco, the EU has proven its worth. We would be wrong to throw away this positive experience because of recent disappointments with the vaccine roll outs.

The EU COVI-19 strategy announced last June and which was voluntarily joined by all 27 member states, including a collective scheme for advanced purchases of vaccines, was intended to avoid a chaotic scramble and ensure the lowest possible price for all. It overlooked a crucial factor, whether the manufacturers had the capacity to deliver the goods on time. That is something which should not be overlooked in the future and it is only the collective strength of the EU member states that can ensure it. Other hiccups like the delays in approving vaccines and what I call the Astra-Zenica debacle when some governments stopped using it on the basis of a statistically insignificant and possibly unconnected event also need to be avoided. Politics never cease to surprise.

Since in the past several EU models on European unity or closer cooperation frequently referred to the US federal model for inspiration, a reference to it here can be instructive. In the USA, the states are mainly responsible for health services and soon after the outbreak of the pandemic they were left to deal with it individually. Generally speaking, the Presidency exercised no leadership and where it did, it misled the public about the gravity of the virus's threat. President Biden's entry into the Whitehouse, reversed this trend and a more efficacious vaccination rollout and stimulus package was offered. The lesson for Europe, if it needs underlining, is that local action reinforced by 'federal' action may hold beneficial prospects.

My last preoccupation is about the economic effects of the stimulus package itself. In economics and the social sciences, we are quite familiar with time lags or the gap between an action and its consequences. Hence the outcomes of these packages will only be known long after the funds have been spent. It is of course the European Commission which has to ensure that the ambitious program rolls out as planned.

However, I do think that the European Parliament which together with Council is the co-legislator of the main legal implementing instruments, should remain seized of the matter and rope in the national parliaments (which includes both governing parties and coalitions as well as, and crucially, opposition parties)

to ensure the most effective scrutiny from here onward. At the end of the process nobody wants the goal of a “greener” Europe to actually become a browner one.

The effect of the pandemic has been asymmetric. Not all of the EU’s economies suffered the same rates of decline; not all occupations were hit in the same way; unemployment did not increase by the same percentage everywhere. Pre-pandemic weak economic sectors and deprived social strata were hit worse than others, but to different extents in different societies. As we look at the horizons and the prospects of a post-Covid19 recovery, we do well to spell out the clear objectives of how to ensure economic growth that is green and sustainable but also just and fair.

COVID-19: PANDEMIC FOLLOWED BY A 'SHE-CESSION'



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When the Chairwoman of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Nicole Mason, commented on recent research findings on the pandemic, she labelled what she saw as a 'shecession'. The term is now used by the World Economic Forum to describe an important aspect of the global socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because, despite what historically happened during previous recessions, when male job loss was a major concern, this time, it seems that the tables have turned: it is female-dominated jobs that have been hit the hardest instead.

Cyprus suffers from the exact same phenomenon as the United States and the rest of Europe, if we take into account the latest official government data on unemployment. According to the Republic of Cyprus' Statistical Service, female unemployment was higher than male unemployment, in 2020, with 60% of those registered as unemployed being women. This is the first time that we are faced with such a phenomenon, in at least two decades: in 2019, women made up 46% of the unemployed, a figure more or less similar to previous years.

This steep rise is extremely worrying, if unemployment trends continue in this same way. Should the recession outlive the pandemic, any past gains towards closing the gender pay gap will gradually be reversed and women will find themselves in a much worse position, income-wise, than the one they have been before. A wider pay gap will translate into wider pension and savings gaps. Less income, less savings and lower pensions will push women deeper down the poverty trap and multiply the already high-risk poverty factor women at retirement age face in Cyprus, where almost one third of elderly women live on the threshold or under the poverty line.

Moreover, as there is an inverse relationship between time spent unemployed and probability of successfully re-entering the labour market, long-term female unemployment resulting from female-dominated job loss, in sectors where market recovery is expected to be slow, will cause this vicious cycle to be perpetuated even further. Let's not forget that the pandemic hit hardest industries such as high street retail, entertainment and leisure, tourism,

domestic cleaning and child care services, where the labour force was comprised predominantly by women, many of them on seasonal or temporary contracts and hourly wages, with not much of a safety net. Economic destitution is almost certainly bound to increase social problems- one of them being gender-based, domestic violence. The absence of financial independence often traps women (and their children) into violent relationships.

Sadly enough, statistics bear witness to such a phenomenon. According to the Cyprus Association for the Prevention of Violence against Women (SPAVO), Cyprus follows suit all other European countries, with a 40% rise in reported incidences of domestic violence in the past year. Half of all calls had come from first-time callers, who had only now dared to report their abuser. As victims are often trapped in their very own home, where the perpetrator is present at all times, a mobile phone hotline has been installed, so that victims can also ask for help via text messages. It is unfortunate that this harsh reality is to be found everywhere in Europe. Lack of access or fear of asking for help can have dire consequences. For example, in Italy, eleven weeks of strict home lockdown resulted into a corresponding number of murders of women by their partners.

In addition to this, tackling the pandemic at the frontline, undoubtedly, increases exposure to the virus and thus, chances of infection. It was women once more who bore the brunt in 2020. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) of the EU, 82% of personnel sitting at the till in retail are women. Therefore, the ones who were lucky enough to have a job, as successive lockdowns all over Europe pushed retail into turmoil, were the ones working for food outlets and supermarkets. However, working while the world was undergoing a pandemic also meant exposure to serious health risk. According to the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Journal, 20% of supermarket personnel has so far got infected with COVID-19. According to the WHO, this is the exact same risk of exposure faced by frontline workers in hospitals, where 76% of medical personnel (doctors and nurses) consists of women. Over and above this, it is women once again who find themselves working in hospital laundries and kitchens, it is women who do the cleaning rounds, exposing themselves to the risk of infection, day in, day out. Quite the oxymoron that so many women have got sick and many died, while trying to keep others safe.

While numbers tell a sad story, it is extremely disheartening that UN data tellingly points to the small number of countries (1 out of 5) on a global scale which have decided to gender mainstream their budgets, so as to balance out the disproportionate consequences of the coronavirus on women. Bearing in mind the proven fact that a high score on the gender equality index is a staunch driver of endogenous economic growth, missing the gender

perspective of the pandemic is not only unfair but also foolish. As the world economy is slowing down, do we really have the luxury to be that?

COVID-19: SO MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS



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"Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly."
– Mahatma Gandhi

The Origins of the Virus, and Questions About the Vaccines

There was much predictable ridicule in 2020 when President Trump suggested that the virus might have leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan.

Interestingly, however, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently appears to be hedging itself by stating, as noted, in a Guardian article [1] on 13 February 2021 (a day before Trump's show-trial impeachment acquittal), *'it has not ruled out any theory on the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, despite one top official earlier this week appearing to dismiss the idea it had escaped from a laboratory'*. Nevertheless, such understandable language hedging at this point may, in my opinion, ironically potentially legitimise much more speculation apropos COVID-19's true origins.

Speculation notwithstanding, the true origins of the virus need immediate clarification—and especially now that there is increasing *exit-strategy* talk about regular vaccinations and ominous vaccine passports. Therefore, I believe the actual nature of the funding of the Wuhan lab and the actual nature of the vaccine-linked research ostensibly undertaken in the Wuhan lab, need close vetting above all. This would help us know whether SARS-CoV-2, the virus that is said to cause COVID-19 began naturally (zoonotically), for instance, possibly by an infected bat commingling with a sick pangolin (or something...).

Or, was the virus engineered to become more infectious, possibly as part of a well-meaning but hazardous attempt to produce broad-range vaccines?

However, with regard to the previously mentioned two questions, assuming that all the rest of the contents of this 'fact-checked' article [2] asserting '*Trump spreads distorted claims on Wuhan Lab funding*' are 'correct', it appears the National Institutes of Health (NIH) gave \$3.4 million in 2014 to the US-based EcoHealth Alliance to study the risk of the future emergence of coronaviruses from bats. Subsequently, EcoHealth distributed \$600,000 of that total to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a collaborator on the project, pre-approved by NIH. EcoHealth, however, among others, has COVID-19 vaccine producer Johnson & Johnson as a partner. Additionally, Dr Fauci, who is 'currently' a strong proponent of lockdowns, vaccines and even double-mask wearing, is the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), which is part of the above mentioned NIH funding body.

'So what?' you might ask.

Well, following this specific train of thought further, firstly, we need to clarify whether this COVID-19 virus actually did originate in, and actually did accidentally escape from, the funded study lab in Wuhan. Secondly, we need to discount any assertions that there were sinister ulterior motives for funding the study in the first place. Furthermore, alternative (more extreme) theories regarding the intentional release of the virus from the Wuhan laboratory have the potential to become a catalyst for massive and abrupt global social strife.

In spite of the fact that many critical questions in the political arena never seem to get answered, at least publically, this time round the stakes are much higher with the world now undergoing an unprecedented and emergency-approved vaccination programme.

What's more, there is a smoking-gun trail of associated follow-on vaccine-related questions that need more attention.

For instance, why have these vaccines not been sufficiently tested by their manufacturers, or by reliable independently objective bodies (fast-tracking surely has risks)?

Why has the dearth of knowledge appertaining to the vaccines' long-term side effects not been highlighted more in public discussion?

Why has there been a lack of subsequent informed consent?

Why have natural-medicine and traditionally-established medical approaches been repressed in a dubious drive to force through, in the largest *experimentation* in human history, insufficiently-tested vaccines?

Why have the free-speech voices of many front-line doctors promoting other remedies (e.g. over-the-counter, 65-year-old drug, hydroxychloroquine) been quashed disgracefully by so-called-fact-checking social-media platforms? And, what role did big-pharma hospital donors play in this all?

For instance, Dr Simone Gold, who claimed [3] early covid-19 can be cured very effectively with zinc and hydroxychloroquine, has questioned why so many non-medical-expert journalists claimed hydroxychloroquine is ineffective even when there were numerous studies showcasing its efficacy against COVID-19.

By the same token, WHO since 20 May 2020 [4] changed its tune somewhat by becoming more open to the use of chloroquine/ hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19 case management.

Furthermore, what are the long-term effects of the relatively-new and conditionally-EU-certified mRNA vaccines?

Even Mark Zuckerberg took a flip-flopping 'anti-vax' stance (for a while, publically) in violation of his own platform's new policy stating [5] on July 2020 *'I share some caution on this [vaccine] because we Just don't know the long-term side effects of basically modifying people's DNA and RNA'*.

Also, Dolores Cahill, a Professor in Translational Sciences at University College Dublin (<https://people.ucd.ie/dolores.cahill/about>) has predicted [6] mRNA vaccines may lead to numerous deaths after the injection. She has explained how the "cytokine storm" is an antibody dependent response of the human body and how that explains the increase in deaths after taking the coronavirus vaccine.

Or, is she lying for some underhanded reason?

However, her assertions in part also resonate with the Dr med Wolfgang Wodarg and Dr Michael Yeadon dramatic [petition](#) [7] to the European Medicines Agency on 1 December 2020 vis-à-vis administrative/regulatory action regarding confirmation of efficacy end points and use of data in connection with the Pfizer/Biotech mRNA based vaccine candidate(s).

Moreover, in a Guardian piece [8] on 10 Jan 2021, Amanda Holpuch notes that even though mRNA vaccines Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech have high efficacy rates [apparently], *'across the country, health workers with the first access to the vaccine are turning it down.'*

Why are vaccine producers still indemnified against having to pay compensation when there have been growing reports of adverse side effects and even many asserted deaths?

Why are people being pressurised to vaccinate themselves in the billions by governments when so many answers remain pending?

Shockingly, by way of example, on 19 January 2021, the Indonesian Deputy Minister of Law and Human Rights, even said [9] that *'COVID-19 vaccination is an obligation of every citizen. Those who refuse to be vaccinated will be sentenced to one year in prison and fined up to one hundred million rupiahs (US\$ 7,100).'*

How many booster 'jabs' will people need to take to *'apparently'* protect themselves from the randomly appearing and 'fear-porned' variants, and why bother, if the vaccines, it is said, don't even protect you from catching or spreading COVID-19? Pfizer-BioNTech, for example, announced on 25 February 2021 [10] that they will be testing a third dose of their COVID-19 vaccine.

Why do government experts not ostensibly worry about the health risks of wearing possibly filthy masks, which could, by the way, lead to certain fungal infections (e.g. candida) [11], increased gum disease, psychological damage (e.g. depression), or skin disease issues? And, on the topic of mask wearing, to what degree has it become just ritualistic virtue signalling of social conformity (you know, a possible example of CDS—COVID Derangement Syndrome)?

'Moving' LBC (originally the London Broadcasting Company) pro-vaccine PR video aside [12], isn't this all just *full-blown sky-falling crazy*?

In sum, judging anecdotally by the increasing numbers of forum comments, this tragic comedy-of-errors' quagmire of unanswered questions appears to be leading some people to ask very extremely *'are they (the eugenicists) really just trying to kill us off?'*

Were Governments Negligent in Following the Advice of Key COVID-19 Advisory Organisations?

Did governments consider what independent and external controls had been in place in COVID-19 advisory organisations to ascertain the influence on policy of any of their large 'philanthropic' donors?

In addition, did governments consider whether there might have been any potential conflicts of interest of any such donors, if they also had had shares in COVID-19 vaccine companies? If no such controls existed or could be proven in a reliable way to be disinterested, I believe a strong case for legal action against governments on the grounds of bypassing established human rights/constitutional law negligently is warranted.

For instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO), which is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health, has been a focal advisory point during the COVID-19 pandemic (especially for its seeming ‘disciple’ ‘fear-pushing narrative’ social media); it has more than 7000 people from more than 150 countries working in 150 country offices.

According to Wikipedia WHO page [13], its top four contributors in US dollars for the 2018/2019 biennium were the US (893 million, 15,9% share), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (531 million, 9,4% share), the UK (435 million, 7,7% share), and GAVI Vaccine Alliance (371 million, 6,6% share). GAVI Vaccine Alliance, out of curiosity, is also funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In addition, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who likewise hold various ‘allegedly very profitable’ coronavirus vaccine stocks, is also a donor of The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is a national public health institute in the United States.

Additionally, allowing ad-hoc government-appointed medical-committees—often with debatable pertinent medical expertise—to make frequently absurd and arbitrary dictates for such a long period is utterly flabbergasting and on the whole, economically suicidal. What’s more, even though such seemingly tyrannical, top-down decrees have affected most dramatically and detrimentally the livelihoods and human rights of so many people globally, many billionaires, in particular, have prospered tremendously during this gloomy period—and such wealth disparity must surely be breeding extremely dangerous wide-scale *let-them-eat-cake* malcontent.

Clearly, there should have been critical democratic discussion and independent unbiased analyses by a much wider range of experts of the science behind medical committee decisions that had been made. As a consequence, obviously, ‘alternative hypotheses’ regarding for example a Great Reset, Global World Government, 5G, population reduction through forced vaccination and the like have thrived during this period.

As such, is it not the civic duty of lawyers with the appropriate expertise to step forward en masse and take action against their governments for the good of their countries, peoples and future generations?

So How Serious Really is This Virus?

At the time of writing this paper (February, 2021)—and putting any contention regarding test efficacy and the role of pre-existing conditions aside for now—worldwide COVID-19 infections and deaths stood at approximately 107 million and 2,35 million respectively.

By way of comparison, the 1918 influenza pandemic or Spanish flu killed about 50 million in a world population of 1,8 billion; an equivalent pandemic in today's world of 7,85 billion would have killed over 218 million people. Interestingly, Dr Mark Sircus holds [14] that simple and cheaply available medicines (very likely anathema to big pharma) are simply being repressed shockingly, e.g. sodium bicarbonate, which was used against the Spanish flu pandemic over 100 years ago.

In addition, if this is helpful, 2,35 million COVID-19 deaths (which include the comorbidity majority) are a mere three deaths per 10000 population. This low ratio, out of curiosity, in part concurs with the now notoriously removed table from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) site [15] (COVID-19 survivability rates: 0-19 years old is 99,997%, 20-49 years old is 99,98%, 50-69 years old is 99,5%, 70 years old is 94,6%).

So is this really such a big killer?

Could the situation we find ourselves in today also be an outcome of possible extensive (*not-being-able-to-think-outside-the-box*) systemic indoctrination of professional workers? This point also resonates with Jeff Schmidt's book 'Disciplined Minds'.

Even though I appreciate people are dying of COVID-19, and even though I realise that is tragic in itself, do these deaths warrant, for example, the gigantic collapse of so many businesses, the colossal depression-level increases in unemployment, increased poverty, or the cancellations/delays of so many life-threatening medical check-ups (e.g. cancer screening)?

Please also note, the catastrophic effect of COVID-19 decision-making on restaurants; for instance, according to the NYC Hospitality Alliance [16], 92 percent of NYC restaurants sampled couldn't pay their December 2020 rent.

People sadly die in this world—that is our joint *dust-to-dust* fate. And, apparently over 100 billion of us have died (mostly unverifiably) on planet earth so far, according to Carl Haub, a senior demographer at the Population Reference Bureau. Every day on planet earth about 150000 of us die in total. We are told, in spite of the seemingly ineffective '*stay safe*' platitudes, that approximately 6400 of us each day die of COVID-19. But how many of those 6400 had underlying conditions? How many of them would have died anyway if they had caught, for example, a really bad flu virus?

A table [17] on New York City coronavirus deaths, for instance, is quite revealing in this regard (see the table below). Clearly, if you have underlying illnesses, your risk of dying (if you catch it) is exponentially higher. Underlying illnesses include diabetes, lung disease, cancer, immunodeficiency, heart disease, hypertension, asthma, kidney disease, and GI/liver disease.

So why are such advisory organisations and governments not forcefully promoting the strengthening of our natural immune systems or putting those most at risk in lockdown?

Age of Coronavirus Deaths

We are collecting and analyzing the data from all US States. In the meantime, below we show the data provided by [New York City Health as of May 13, 2020](#):

AGE	Number of Deaths	Share of deaths	With underlying conditions	Without underlying conditions	Unknown if with underlying cond.	Share of deaths of unknown + w/o cond.
0 - 17 years old	9	0.06%	6	3	0	0.02%
18 - 44 years old	601	3.9%	476	17	108	0.8%
45 - 64 years old	3,413	22.4%	2,851	72	490	3.7%
65 - 74 years old	3,788	24.9%	2,801	5	982	6.5%
75+ years old	7,419	48.7%	5,236	2	2,181	14.3%
TOTAL	15,230	100%	11,370 (75%)	99 (0.7%)	1,551 (24.7%)	25.3%

Never has the planet been locked down to such a level.

Never has the right to earn a living been denied to so many.

And, such denials of basic human rights have been based on very contentious data and based on not having to answer so many critical questions efficaciously.

Who would risk starting a business now with so many uncertainties?

In addition, what does an infection rate of over 107 million worldwide actually mean? How many of those infected people even know they have the virus?

The CDC provides some interesting data [18] on comparisons of COVID-19 and pneumonia deaths. One might wonder, upon reading the data, why the occasional lockdown restriction had not also been put in place to reduce pneumonia deaths.

But then again, the COVID-19 data is only as meaningful as the accuracy of the tests used to measure its presence; there is sadly a lot of evidence to suggest some tests (e.g. PCR) were not sufficiently reliable nor valid (also see [7]).

WHO lists some interesting general reading on its Health Topics' page [19] to help us contextualise the relative non-severity of COVID-19:

- Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the number 1 cause of death globally, taking an estimated 17.9 million lives each year;
- 1.9 billion people were obese in 2016 worldwide;
- Cancer is the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for an estimated 9.6 million deaths, or one in six deaths, in 2018;
- Alcohol consumption contributes to 3 million deaths each year globally;
- Approximately 1.35 million people die each year as a result of road traffic crashes;
- There were an estimated 229 million cases of malaria in 2019, and the estimated number of malaria deaths stood at 409 000;
- About 422 million people worldwide have diabetes, the majority living in low-and middle-income countries, and 1.6 million deaths are directly attributed to diabetes each year;
- An estimated 55 million people globally are affected by droughts every year, and 700 million people are at-risk of being displaced as a result of drought by 2030;
- Depression affects more than 264 million people worldwide;
- 38 million people in the world in 2019 were living with HIV;
- Close to 800 000 people die by suicide every year;
- Every year, 10 million people fall ill with tuberculosis (TB). Despite being a preventable and curable disease, 1.5 million people die from TB each year;
- Every year, an estimated 11–20 million people get sick from typhoid and between 128 000 and 161 000 people die from it worldwide;
- Furthermore, <https://www.worldometers.info/> states that there are 849,568,343 undernourished people in the world and 24,184 people have died of hunger 'today'.

So why on earth has the world fixated so hysterically on the COVID-19 pandemic for so long? After all, the 150-million-people 'epidemic' in world homelessness, for instance, might seem like a worthier cause to some.

Doesn't something therefore feel very wrong with all of this? Surely it hasn't been overblown, has it?

However, I'm sure Moderna, for instance, doesn't feel anything is 'very wrong' with this at all: it has expected windfall profits of nearly 20 billion dollars, as noted in Reuters (2021 February 25) [20].

Then again, couldn't the big pharma business model be viewed as just so *scam-topsy-turvy*: wouldn't it really be ideally profitable for them for people to be permanently sick or permanently at risk of being sick?

As a final point, have COVID-19 measures just been a case of excessively over-caring governments?

Or would the Albert Camus quote, for some, come to mind ("The welfare of humanity is always the alibi of tyrants.")?

'Roads' Leading to the Role of Central Banks

So who then actually believes COVID-19 was intentionally created as part of a dastardly and perfectly-timed plan to instigate, for instance, an ideological, techno-serfdom, Great Reset, leading to 5G-AI-*mark-of-the beast* neo-feudal oppression?

Well, I don't for one.

That would mean our (true) world leaders are massively intelligent and supremely organised—and if that were true, why has our world always been such a corrupt mess?

For me, the COVID-19 pandemic, 'at the ground-level' at least, looks more like an example of a really bad train-wreck of centralised human incompetence.

Moreover, as the dynamics of human societies are clearly immensely complex, unpredictability is the only logical outcome when unsophisticated and half-baked solutions are applied top-down to solve problems that have not been appropriately defined in a scientific manner.

Therefore, why were a 'bunch' of so-called government appointed, likely WHO-advised, (clearly *tunnel-vision*) 'experts' allowed to bypass the law of the land and then allowed to destroy so many businesses and lives by dictating, for instance, hoax-level ineffective lockdowns, impracticable, ineffective mask-wearing, and frequently absurd behavioural rules based on very questionable virus-test data?

What is more, Dr Denis Rancourt declares [21] that all-cause mortality over the last decade, generally speaking, hasn't changed much, and also holds that government policies and measures, such as lockdowns, psychological terror campaigns, and erroneous hospital protocols and medical treatments, have led to unnecessary deaths.

But COVID-19 has also exposed a systemic weakness: not having competent people in government in certain 'press-hyped' situations can have fatal consequences.

In addition, what really will be the role of Bitcoin and its 8500+ altcoin sisters?

Even though Bitcoin has increased astoundingly in value (especially during the lockdowns), and even though Bitcoin, in particular, has strangely been becoming increasingly *in-your-face* mainstream (especially during recent lockdowns), will a sudden attempt be made to crucify it and the altcoins at the regulation cross in a ruse effort to introduce 'an official' cashless Central Bank centralised coin?

Probably not (it's more likely certain coin technologies will actually be co-opted).

But let's go with this subplot for a moment.

So would such a new Central Bank crypto coin be viewed as a necessary outcome, if the fragile fiat currencies had collapsed as a result of immense and desperate Central Bank inflationary monetary expansion during the pandemic?

Alternatively, could the pandemic end up being viewed (most extremely to many) as having been created intentionally to instigate a new and highly desirable digital (universal-income-ready) cashless money system?

If we consider the latter possibly *end-of-the-cline* point of view—some might say—'outrageously conspiratorial' hypothesis for a moment, one might note that COVID-19 appeared very quickly after a very worrying US banking-system freeze-up starting in September 2019 with the New York Fed in October 2019 announcing it would have to be increasing its temporary overnight repo operations to \$120 billion a day.

What's more, the pandemic has given Central Banks carte blanche to do what they must surely love doing most: create more fiat debt without limit as the lenders and buyers of last resort.

Their ever-increasing *Final-Solution* mechanism of pumping easy-money into unprecedented 'everything bubble' asset purchases has created a freakish Frankenstein financial environment—hitherto never seen in human history.

Moreover, their immensely expanded balance sheets have permitted the endless propping up of the counter-intuitive Ponzi-scheme zombie stock markets, and has also created a huge disconnect with *weakest-recovery-ever* reality—the 'real' economy in the US at the same time, for instance, has been

experiencing depression-level unemployment, record-level small business closures, escalating homelessness and a growing chasm between rich and poor.

Sadly, Central Bank fiat capital has been deployed unintelligently and this has created moral hazard with near zero-level interest-rate risk not being quantified.

For instance, M2 money supply is now parabolic, interest rates are at the lowest levels in human history, the Buffet indicator is showing that the US stock market is bigger than the US GDP by a margin that has never been equalled, the gigantic bond market bubble is by itself the biggest bubble in human history, the abnormally repeating consecutive housing bubble is at dangerous economy-busting 2008 levels, and the one-trillion-dollar crypto-market bubbles are looking more like the Dotcom bubble (John Rubini, 2021, February 21) [22].

Likewise, and more worryingly, the pandemic has green-lighted and facilitated the growing merger of corporations and governments (AKA fascism) and is making the emergence of a hideous two-tier system virtually certain, if not reversed now.

And this sadly is happening before our confused eyes with sensationalised media distractions about, for example, 'new cases', 'new variants', 'vaccine passports', 'free movement', 'thought criminals', 'YouTube three-strike censorship' or 'green passes'.

However, it is likely we will never find out the true role the pandemic played in this ensuing economic devastation.

We will never know at this higher non-ground level, whether Central Banks and their inter-connected institutions, in a desperate attempt to save the system from this 'unforeseen and terrible' pandemic, somehow managed to end up owning colossally more fortuitously while creating huge Depression-level impoverishment for countless others.

Or, on the other hand, we will also never know at this higher non-ground level, whether Central Banks and their inter-connected institutions became dystopian beneficiaries of the pandemic because somehow they planned it as part of the next chapter of human monetary history.

But—on a related side-track—we do now know that the current FED Chair [23] (and former FED chair, for that matter) is now also giving debatable *new-normal* medical advice by saying '*getting Americans vaccinated is the most important thing to help the economy.*' Or is he just trying to pass the buck?

Is this a Naïve Vision of the Future?

Whether by 'faulty' design or whether by the divine inexplicability of accident, the world with the pandemic as catalyst, after an attempted muddle-through period, may, at some point, be thrust into, what future historians may even coin, the Great Shift in human thinking; growing discontent lurking mostly now in the shadows may explode irreparably as a self-inflicted Greater Depression ushers in a titanic and ferocious anti-establishment and anti-state-doctrine [24] global backlash.

These events, once started, likely by much more than an *irate, tireless minority* (Samuel Adams)—may be unstoppable.

Supposedly supremely powerful Central Bank structures may be brushed aside in a(n) historical cleansing of the Temple moment.

Medical-'terrorism/tyranny' (Nuremburg-esque) trials may be sought, especially in allegedly purposely 'suicided' Western economies seemingly shackled in idealistic and delusional progressive-regressive wokeism.

So was this ever really about the virus and its vaccines?

Could one assert that '*Post WWII liberal multiculturalism really gutted absolutes and morality to usher in human reason and communist wokeism* (Leigh, 2021, Viber message)'?

The (real) Fourth Industrial Revolution (something Putin won't laugh at this time) [25] may emerge as a phoenix from the ashes; if it did, it would definitely embrace honest, humble, intelligent and caring people stepping forward to propel the world into a new (more) decentralised age of enlightenment, love and freedom.

However, this vision of the future, by some, might be deemed naïve, because as societies 'restructured into the new (dystopian) paradigm', most people may simply adjust and consent obediently.

The wild card would be war, of course: we really will need to pray that our leaders don't get us into an indescribable shooting war in the meanwhile.

And, sadly, looking at some countries' war (crime) records, personally, I would be praying really hard....

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