# Covid-19 puts the spotlight on international law and Human Rights

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# CONQUERING COMPLEXITY: PERSPECTIVES ON COVID-19

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**Conquering Complexity: Perspectives on COVID-19**

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# Preface

Dear readers, friends, and colleagues of TEIMUN,

The TEIMUN foundation is most excited to welcome you all to our one-of-a-kind academic journal. In collaboration with TEIMUN alumni, policy analysts, scientists and officials at national and international organizations we have made this journal. Here, we provide social and actual commentaries on current events. We hope you will enjoy it.

It has been a highly unusual year for TEIMUN. The outbreak of COVID-19 that took place after GrunnMUN led to the regretful decision of cancelling TEIMUN 2020 in the Hague.

For the first time in thirty-three years, TEIMUN has had to cancel her conference. Every year, the newly elected Board of Directors and Secretariat have given their utmost in organizing the conference in July. We pride ourselves that we receive delegates from the farthest places: we enjoy delegates from Egypt, Indonesia, Ghana, U.S.A, and many more. The participation of these delegates truly shapes the experience of TEIMUN as unique, international, and competitive. This trademark of TEIMUN is essential for all us organizers to uphold. To make sure that TEIMUN is a conference for all international characters and personalities.

Regretfully, COVID-19 made this promise and mission very difficult. With widespread travel bans, financial unclarity, and genuine public health risks, we took the measure to reschedule TEIMUN for next year. We hope you all may understand and support the decision we made.

We are most pleased and ecstatic to introduce the contributions we have received from our own TEIMUN alumni, respectable policy analysts and academics. Despite there being no real replacement for the TEIMUN six-day conference, we hope that the TEIMUN journal will keep you satisfied and waiting for our next conferences in the future.

Enjoy reading the "limited edition" TEIMUN journal,

*Henry Martin*

*President of the*
*TEIMUN Foundation 2019-2020*

*Femke van Splunter*

*Vice-President of the*
*TEIMUN Foundation 2019-20*

# Introduction

**TEIMUN and the COVID-19 pandemic**

For the past 33 years of TEIMUN's existence, the people behind TEIMUN have come up with an overarching theme to guide and inspire all activities of the academic year to come. In the past we have had themes such as 'Pursuing Perpetual Peace: Ideals and Interests at War' 'Dare to Doubt: Developing New Perspectives' and 'Unification or Fragmentation: Challenges in a Globalizing World'. This year, the theme we came up with was 'Conquering Complexity as an International Agent'. The idea behind it was that though nobody would contest that the domain of international affairs is a complex whole, overcoming, changing or acting in such a complex entirety is subjected to different thoughts and debate. How can international complexities be overcome in a way so that positive developments are enacted and stimulated?

If only we knew back then how upfront we would experience such complexities ourselves. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world saw the rise of a rapidly spreading global virus, affecting all ranges of human activity. We at TEIMUN were lucky to still be able to organize our Groningen-based MUN conference at the end of February, seeing that exactly one week later restrictions were introduced that would have made a conference impossible. Unfortunately our flagship conference, also named TEIMUN, that continuously united thousands of people in debate and social exchanges from all over the world for more than thirty years, had to be cancelled. It seemed that TEIMUN, that aims to help all students who want to become more acquainted with international institutions and global affairs, was now struck down by what it is most concerned with: important international phenomena of any kind.

However, we came to the realization that our mission is and should be more than just that of conference organizers. For was it not our goal, despite the initial disappointment, to make students more acquainted with international affairs, instead of organizing a conference per se? Even when TEIMUN is our flagship, it is still a ship: an object that brings you from A to B. Thus, we opportunistically asked ourselves whether we should switch to a different 'mode of transportation'. We wondered whether we could adopt a role that is more like a think tank instead for the time being.

If you are reading this introduction, it means you are reading the answer to that question. Since it is the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the world generally and TEIMUN specifically, it was only right to study its consequences accordingly. It suits our goals to study the pandemic and share these insights with students, partners and other interested people. We do this in the form of the first ever TEIMUN journal, wherein we combine insights and thoughts on the pandemic on a variety of topics from TEIMUN alumni, scientists, policy-makers and (former) officials at national and international organisations.

These individuals, our contributors, are incredibly important to this journal. We could have never written this entire journal ourselves without their help. They voluntarily provided us with their expertise and knowledge in the form of articles on all kinds of subjects. Our contributors come from all walks of life and include students as well as former ministers. Additionally, we are proud that our contributors embody the world's diversity, originating from a wide variety of places. All in all, in this journal you will find around forty COVID-19 related articles and for that we are deeply grateful. We, Inés Faghihi and Jochem Lammersma, who some of you will recognize as the Secretariat of TEIMUN 2019-2020, worked as this journal's editors in chief over the past months.

**What to expect of this journal**

The question we posed to all contributors, in some form or another, is the following: in what way does the COVID-19 crisis affect the political, economic, organizational, cultural or other aspects of international organizations and global affairs? Contributors were free to answer this question in a way they deemed relevant. It can be that they answered this question in a way that highlighted developments that were initiated because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of the articles deal with obstacles and developments though, that did not so much start because of COVID-19, but are pre-existing political, economic or international issues and developments that are now put to the forefront of our attention (or not). Some articles cover personal and local experiences, others write about the world's affairs at large. Readers will also note that some articles are written academically, while others are written as essays, opinion articles and even some short statements.

In this journal, our contributors are covering topics ranging from security, governance, economics, sustainability, sports and more. In that way, this project not only shows how truly global the pandemic is, but particularly how it affects all disciplines, sectors and decision-making. That is not the same as stating this journal gives a complete overview of the effects the pandemic has and will have. We at TEIMUN tend to be students of international relations, law, history and similar fields, so are our alumni. The professionals we reached out to, tend to come from similar fields, because of a combination of our biases as well as our interests and connections. One could say that this journal therefore is a TEIMUN perspective on the COVID-19 crisis, in the sense that it combines the unique contributions from people that relate to our community in a certain way.

**Perspectives on the Pandemic**

In the first chapter of this journal, readers can find several articles dealing with the pandemic as a crisis and security challenge. Here, lessons learned are drawn and advice is given based on what we know of the science on crisis and disaster response, but also what we can learn from humanitarian missions and COVID-19's potential for peace.

The chapters that follow deal with the international, governance and local aspects of the pandemic subsequently. In the international chapter authors emphasize the crucial importance of coming up with a response to an international pandemic that is equally international. In the governance and organization chapter, a wide variety of organizational matters are discussed, ranging from socio-economic problems and governance to COVID-19 tests. In the 'Geography of COVID-19' chapter, four authors who write about the distinct experiences in their home towns and countries share their views on how the virus is being held back on the ground.

In chapters six and seven, articles are grouped together based on two themes that were of particular importance to our authors, namely the European Union and climate change and sustainability. In chapter six, several authors explain how the pandemic poses an obstacle as well as an opportunity to the European Union, delving in topics such as member solidarity, FDI and the EU's relationship with Africa. In the articles in chapter seven, some authors account for how the pandemic worsens a clash between our economic system and need to preserve ecosystems, become sustainable and adapt to the changing climate.

To round up the journal, in the last chapter you will find articles that are more focussed on personal experiences. That is either because the topics discussed there deal more directly with activities wherein most of us directly participate, such as social media and sports, or because the articles deal more extensively with the authors' personal experiences and views in times of this COVID-19 pandemic.

As main editors we realize that categorizations like these are not only made by the two of us, but are always a bit artificial as well. It is not that no other authors, except for those in the international chapter, affirm the need for international action. It is neither the case that no other authors, except for those in the climate/sustainability chapter, address the clash between our economies and ecologies. We tried to group articles together based on their most prevalent commonalities, the way we thought was most fitting. Somebody else may have grouped articles differently, but we believe this makes the journal a more pleasant read. Additionally, the articles were grouped together as such because we believe comparing those articles in particular will also make the reader come to interesting comparisons.

**Conquering Complexity?**

We do not believe conquering complexity is a matter of simplifying matters and rushing ahead. Instead, we hope this journal project will help readers to develop a better understanding of the global pandemic. Perhaps you will realize something big, that you were unaware of before. It can also be that you learn new facts, be it about COVID-19 tests, European FDI or the pandemic in Afghanistan. In any case, we hope you will enjoy reading this TEIMUN journal.

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**MESSAGE TO**
**THE EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS**

**Groningen, The Netherlands**

Our world faces an unprecedented crisis that is causing widespread human suffering, upending lives, devastating the global economy and risking reversals of hard-won progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

In these trying times, I welcome the holding of your Model UN activity. Your unwavering commitment to international cooperation is essential for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic – the biggest test our world has faced since the Second World War.

We can only defeat the coronavirus if we do so globally. We must recognize that the poorest countries and most vulnerable will be the hardest hit, and that decades of development gains could be reversed. Countries already suffering armed conflict now face further upheaval. And the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on the world's women.

The United Nations is undertaking a wide-ranging response – calling for a global ceasefire and working to control the pandemic, save lives, mitigate the socio-economic impacts, fight stigma and recover better.

We are strongly committed to providing full support to all, guided by our shared values. The world needs your energy, and I draw great hope from seeing your generation mobilize to address the challenges of our time and to build a healthier, more equitable and sustainable future for all.

# CHAPTER I

# COVID-19 AS A CRISIS AND SECURITY CHALLENGE

## A Comment

*By Alexander Rinnooy Kan (19 August, 2020)*

The Corona crisis, the informal name for the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, has wreaked havoc on an unprecedented scale. It has ruthlessly exposed many weaknesses in the global health care system, and confronted many countries with suspected and unsuspected vulnerabilities in coping with large scale viral infections.

Not only were the risks and dangers highly underestimated for much too long a time, but most countries simply failed initially to impose the discipline required for an effective response. The subsequent unavoidable lockdowns caused predictable economic suffering that could and should have been addressed by large scale national and international public spending, but even that materialized too late in most cases.

The crisis is far from over. Many countries are facing the risk of a second wave, and vaccines, in furious development, are not likely to be available before it hits. Africa has so far escaped relatively lightly, but that may well change. And big countries like Brazil, India and, embarrassingly enough, the United States will continue to add large numbers to the global statistics of illness and death.

Amid all these bleak perspectives, there are some positive highlights that can also be observed. Around the globe heartwarming examples abound of solidarity with the sick, and the medical profession has demonstrated unbelievable dedication to its patients and a great ability to improvise and collaborate. Researchers have demonstrated unprecedented willingness to share data and research results. And although it was slow in coming, the need for international collaboration at governmental level has now been well recognized.

The latter represents one of the important lessons to be learned. Without doubt, the Corona crisis will not be the last one of its kind. Whether future causes for global crises will be technical, biological, economic or political, a properly prepared joint response, coordinated by the United Nations or some similar body, can do much to prevent the large scale suffering that Covid-19 has caused.

*Alexander Rinnooy Kan is a professor of Economics at the University of Amsterdam. He served as the Chairman of the VNO and served in the later merger with the NCW. He joined the executive board of bank and insurer ING, where he remained a member until June 2006. From 2006 until 2012, he was a Crown-appointed member and chairman of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands. Alexander Rinnooy Kan is a member of the TEIMUN Honorary Leadership Committee.*

## Covid-19 and Human Security

*By Sami Faltas*

It can be startling to be reminded of something familiar. Today, the Covid-19 pandemic is dramatically illustrating the importance of good governance, true leadership and collective responsibility, especially in a crisis. It is also demonstrating why we need to develop a practical approach to human security, a concept that has so far remained somewhat nebulous. In this article, I will review some of the lessons about security governance we are learning and relearning in the current crisis.

### Freedom from Fear and Want

In early 1941, the Second World War was raging in Europe and Asia, but the United States was not yet militarily involved. In his State of the Union address, the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed four freedoms for all people. The first two were classic human rights, namely freedom of speech and religion. The others were new and referred to security: freedom from fear and freedom from want. FDR defined these, "translated into world terms", as safety from the danger of international war, and the right to a healthy life in peace. At the time, it was an unusual notion that states should not only defend themselves and their population against war and oppression, but also shelter each individual person from illness, poverty and deprivation. After the president's death in 1945, the idea was developed further by his widow.

A committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Its article 3 says that everyone has a right to "life, liberty and security of person." However, it would take another 50 years, and the end of the rivalry between the leading world powers, for the community of states to fully and explicitly guarantee human security for everyone.

### Human Security

The breakthrough came in 1994, when the UN Development Programme's annual Human Development Report said human security is the true purpose of security policy. This is an ambitious claim. According to UNDP, human security encompasses seven areas: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNDP, 1994). In 2000, the UN elevated human security to a right: "Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice"(UN, 2000). And in 2003, a high-level international report by Amartya Sen and others called for a security policy "centred on people—not states"(Commission on Human Security, 2003).

Today, human security is one of the buzzwords that governments and international organizations like to use. It is particularly popular among donor states and agencies dispensing aid and advice to other countries, and its appeal is easy to understand. Who would deny that people should be safe and feel safe, and this is not exclusively their own responsibility? Surely the state and society should provide them with protection and reassurance, at least when this is most needed? Anyway, how useful is security policy if it protects the state and its territory, while the people are living in fear and danger? To ask these questions is to answer them.

However, human security has not been translated into policy. None of the countries I know have developed a policy to put human security as the all-encompassing umbrella described by the UNDP into practice. Instead, they implement separate policies and services to protect the population against various dangers.

**The Compartmentalization of Security Policy**

Let us consider the case of the Netherlands, a well-organized, prosperous country that protects its people comparatively well. There is a Dutch security policy in the limited and common sense of national security, which aims to shield the Netherlands against foreign domination, terrorist and cyberattacks and a collapse of law and order. The two most prominent existential dangers that confront the Netherlands today and tomorrow—Covid-19 today and climate change—are not addressed by Dutch security policy. Climate change is beyond the remit of this article, so we will look only at the current pandemic.

In the Netherlands, the fight against the coronavirus is tackled by the ministry of public health with the support of an interdepartmental coordination committee and a team of scientific and medical advisers. So far, this has shielded the Dutch from the worst impact of the pandemic. After a few weeks lost in hesitation, the state took the threat of Covid-19 seriously and adopted a strong multidisciplinary approach to protect the country. The police, the military and other security services are supporting the effort to contain the disease. But the crisis is not defined as a threat to national security, and it is not tackled by security policy. One could say that security policy in the broadest sense of the term is compartmentalized, with the defence establishment responsible for military security, the police authorities responsible for law and order, the health authorities responsible for disease control, and so on.

Like the Netherlands, most states seek to protect their people without espousing human security as a catch-all policy. There are several reasons. First, there is a conceptual problem. If the concept of security is expanded as much as in the HDR report of 1994, it becomes blurred and unwieldy. When a word comes to mean everything, it ultimately means nothing. Second, there is the problem of welfare politics. If it were at all possible, protecting everyone against everything would require immense resources. Few countries have such resources, and even if they do, their politicians and voters may not want the state to provide all-round social security.[1] Third, even if a country can overcome the first two problems, it will struggle to get all state and private organizations to work together in an all-encompassing security policy.

**Impossible but Essential**

For these and other reasons, governments pay little more than lip service to human security. Donor states like the Netherlands recommend the idea to poor and fragile countries, but do not pursue it at home. This may be understandable, but I believe it is a mistake. The notion that states have a duty to enable their people to be safe and feel safe is a good one, not only for underdeveloped and war-torn countries, but also for stable, prosperous and democratic states.

[1] In the USA, politicians cannot even agree on a scheme that would cover the cost of medical care for all inhabitants. In 2018, the most recent year for which statistics are available, over 27 million Americans had no health insurance.

However, we need to translate it into practical policy. To do this successfully, I believe we need to keep three points in mind.

First, it is impossible to protect everyone against all dangers and fears. Instead, states and societies should aim to improve the ability of children, women and men to be safe and feel safe. They should be enabled and empowered to take care of themselves and each other, and given the protection they cannot provide for themselves.

Second, ensuring human security is not specifically a task for the security sector. Security policy should continue to focus on threats to the state and the country as a whole. Rather, human security should be an overriding concern for state and society. Ultimately, it is everyone's responsibility.

Third, the state and society can only improve human security when they learn to predict the impacts of laws, policies, problems and events on the safety of children, women and women, and to take these impacts into account in their actions.

I propose a focussed, practical approach to human security. States should continually consider how policies, measures and events may affect the safety and peace of mind of their people, especially the most vulnerable, and take these into account in their actions. This is particularly important in an emergency. It is too early to definitively identify the lessons we can learn from the current Covid-19 pandemic, but I will point to some stories that I believe are instructive. They illustrate the need for a human perspective on government policy and events that cause danger and fear.

**Impacts of Covid-19**

In recent years, epidemiologists and others involved in disease control have often warned of the imminent danger of a new pandemic. Speaking after the Ebola epidemic of 2014, Bill Gates said the world was not ready for the next epidemic, but it could be if it started preparing immediately.[2] Had these warnings been heeded, the fight against COVID-19 could have started earlier and been more effective, saving many lives and reducing the economic impact of the pandemic. In the event, precious weeks were lost before serious measures were put in place, and even rich countries struggled to put in place the capacity and services needed. This suggests that states are not good at preparing to deal with unfamiliar threats.

When the epidemic struck, it was understandably first defined as a threat to public health, and states confronted it accordingly. As the grave economic impact of the crisis became clear, governments launched measures to mitigate these problems. Later, less obvious ways in which the epidemic was affecting people's security drew attention:

- While men are more liable to die of Covid-19, women are more vulnerable in other ways. For instance, in confinement they risk facing more domestic violence. Recent experience also suggests that on average, they have less access to testing and other services;
- Even if they are shielded from the epidemic, people living in nursing homes and remote locations face the risk of isolation and despair;

[2] https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_the_next_outbreak_we_re_not_ready?language=dz. The video had been viewed some 36 million times when it was accessed on 26 June 2020.

- People with low incomes are often at greater risk because they were unable to work from home and in their workplace faced a high risk of being infected;
- Minorities like African Americans suffer even more from the crisis than their underprivileged social position would lead one to expect;
- In a crisis like the current one, ruling politicians sometimes use emergency powers to suppress protest, harass critics and jail opponents.

There were also some favourable surprises in the first phase of the pandemic. Faced with hoarders, some shopkeepers introduced their own rationing schemes to ensure an adequate supply to all customers. This not only helped to prevent shortages, but also to calm the fear of them. More generally, most people responded to the emergency in a responsible fashion, and there was a growth of community spirit.

**A Responsibility for All**

The Covid-19 crisis has put a heavy responsibility on the population as a whole to observe certain restrictions, and in the early stages of the pandemic, most people in most countries willingly complied. Whether the rules were backed up by penalties or relied on voluntary compliance, most people did the right thing. To the extent that the pandemic has been contained, we must give much of the credit to ordinary people. However, as the restrictions are gradually lifted, and then in some cases re-imposed, people may be less inclined to follow the rules. This may be due to impatience, a lack of trust in the authorities, or the need to make a living, even if this cannot be done safely. The lesson here is that while various actors have various duties to perform, in the final analysis, security is everyone's responsibility. States need to create the conditions under which people are able and willing to act responsibly.

**Coordination and Cooperation**

Faced with a complex, deadly and fast-moving enemy, government ministries, health authorities, local government, the police, the military, the schools, emergency services, firms, charity organizations and community groups are under a great pressure to work together closely. This is difficult, even in normal conditions. Organizations may be unaccustomed to working together and therefore hesitant. There may be specific obstacles that prevent them from working together. And even if nothing else stands in the way of their cooperation, it may be hard to organize. All this is under normal conditions. In a crisis, coordination and cooperation may either become easier or more difficult. On the one hand, emergencies can focus the mind and foster a sense of togetherness, but on the other they may aggravate disputes and rivalries between organizations and leaders.

In Brazil and the USA, two countries where the death toll is high and still rising rapidly in the summer of 2020, we see both effects. The epidemic has led to a growth in community spirit among Brazilians and Americans, but it has also sparked turf battles and quarrels between state governors and the federal government. Sharp political divisions also undermine the capacity of the state to act effectively in a crisis. Despite their federal system, Canada and Germany have fought Covid-19 with greater success than Brazil and the USA. It is worth looking carefully at the factors of their success. It may be due to better governance. Alternatively, or additionally, the fact that mainstream politics in Canada and Germany today is not as adversarial as in Brazil and the USA may be helping these countries to battle the pandemic effectively.

**Authoritarian and Democratic States**

Do authoritarian states battle the epidemic more effectively than democratic states, maybe because they have fewer restraints? Recent events do not provide a clear answer. Faced with Covid, Belarus, North Korea and Turkmenistan simply denied that their countries were affected. They are suppressing all news of the epidemic and punishing whistle-blowers, with potentially disastrous consequences for their population. At first, China did the same, but when the Beijing government made the fight against the Coronavirus its priority, it used the full power of its communist state to push back the epidemic. This probably saved the lives of millions of people and allayed the fears of many more, not only in China, but around the world. I suppose some authoritarian states are better governed than others.

The track record of democratic states is also mixed. We cannot yet rank their achievements in the struggle against the pandemic, but Brazil, the United Kingdom and the USA seem less successful than Australia, Germany, South Korea and Taiwan. However, government policy and popular response do not determine the success of an anti-Corona strategy alone. The impact of the virus is also a matter of climate, geography, demography, public health, population density and luck. In the southern Pacific Ocean, New Zealand has done a fine job fighting Covid-19, but it has also been fortunate.

**Good Leadership**

According to one of prime minister Jacinda Ardern's chief advisors, the success of New Zealand's approach lies in a combination of solid science and good leadership. He criticizes the initially complacent attitude taken by leaders in the USA and the UK and adds that while Ardern's style of leadership worked well for New Zealand, Australia, with a different style of government, has also made good progress in its efforts to stop Covid-19.[3]

What can we learn from Jacinda Ardern about effective leadership? Warren Bennis identifies four essential skills of leaders.(Bennis and Thomas, 2002) First is the ability to engage others in shared meaning. Ardern speaks of her country as a team of five million, implying that, like the national rugby team, the All Blacks, New Zealanders are standing shoulder to shoulder in the fight against the pandemic. I would add that engaging others in shared meaning also implies the ability to communicate clearly and convincingly, a skill the PM obviously possesses. Indeed, the second quality mentioned by Bennis is a distinctive and compelling voice. Third, Bennis believes that leadership requires a sense of integrity. Ardern's reputation and her open manner suggest that she meets this requirement too. But, Bennis says, the most critical skill of the all is 'adaptive capacity.' People become leaders when they overcome adversity, says Bennis, and this requires an ability to grasp context, as well as hardiness (ibid). Ardern was confronted with the gravity of the Covid-19 threat, understood it and defined it as a challenge to team New Zealand. Taking an unusual approach, she imposed strict rules that would enable her community of five million to beat the disease.

Some have pointed out that countries with a female head of government seem to be doing better in the struggle against the pandemic than countries with men leading the government. I look

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MABsH83f9K4, accessed on 28 May 2020

forward to research that will show whether this is true, and if so, what it means. Maybe women are indeed—on average and all other things being equal—better leaders in a crisis than men. Or maybe well-governed countries are more likely to have female leaders and also more likely to deal with a crisis successfully. It is even possible that both explanations are valid.

Good leadership fosters trust and a willingness to follow the leader. This voluntary compliance is essential, because in general, laws can only be enforced to a very limited extent. Unless most people obey a law of their own accord, it will probably fail. If, however, people believe their leaders are doing what is right for the country and listening to solid expert advice, a large majority may be willing to comply with strict new rules without much enforcement. During the most frightening period of the Covid-19 pandemic, people in most countries seemed willing to comply even with drastic restrictions. At this time of writing, Covid-related restrictions are being gradually lifted in Europe, and there is a risk that the growing sense of normalcy will lead people to disregard the restrictions that remain. A false sense of safety could lead to actions that render the rules ineffective and cause the epidemic to rebound. I suspect that there are important lessons to learn from this as well, but it is too early to identify them.

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## Didn’t we know it was coming? - What the science of disasters tells us about the pandemic

*By Maurice Thaidigsmann*

The Coronavirus pandemic came as a surprise to many of us, including most policymakers. That is despite repeated warnings by infectiologists and activists. Most prominently, Bill Gates, engaged in the fight against epidemics through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, criticized the unpreparedness of societies to a pandemic for years (McKay, 2014).

In this article, I would like to take a look at some of the dynamics and events of the coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) research. The sum of these exemplary failures to prevent or mitigate the crisis points to two central claims made by DRR scholars over decades: (1) institutional shortcomings as part of the ‘human factor’ in the risk equation is key to causing harm from natural hazards and (2) governments have yet to fully streamline disaster risk reduction into all fields of policymaking.

**In defense of governments**

Before diving into the criticism of missed policy making opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that every disaster follows its own rules and predictions are – even with our state of technology in medicine, seismology, weather analysis, etc. – incredibly inaccurate. Governments knew that a pandemic was bound to happen through their respective functional committees and specialized agencies, but not *when* and *in which form*. More specifically, they could not have predicted the type of virus or infection as well as its spread. This is what I call the “fixed hazard uncertainty”: Natural hazards occur with a great deal of chance according to our current standards of measurement and thus feature great uncertainty to humans. At the same time, these hazards are vastly fixed from the human perspective, as they cannot be controlled or altered in their occurrence (yet).

Thus, one cannot blame governments for not having specifically prepared for this virus or having eliminated it before it transferred to the human organism and adapted.

In many ways, this virus is unique and dangerous. The incubation period of the related disease Covid-19, during which infected persons are contagious, can be up to 14 days (Lauer et al., 2020). In comparison to the Ebola Virus or other viruses, it does not kill its host as fast or often (Kortepeter, 2020). And finally, it transmits through aerosols (among others). This combination makes it incredibly hard to contain and allows for an easy spread across the globe. Importantly, the only remedy is immediate and accurate information, to which an appropriate response can be tailored.

Less than the virus itself, the circumstances in which it spread are even more unique. It is the first global pandemic in the era of the Internet. This allows for easier global collaboration on research and vaccine development, but it also allows for some of the ramifications to be bypassed, most prominently through remote working or online shopping. The latter, at first glance positive, effect could be seen as the development of a new adaptation to disasters. However, it also poses a new challenge to governments: mediating the unequal effects of the crisis on certain industries and some social circles vs. others. A one-size-fits-all solution is not applicable.

**The science of disaster risk**

So much for the defense of governments. This applies almost equally to all countries. On the other side, policymakers have – to varying degrees – missed out on opportunities to limit the effects of pandemic by failing to implement recommendations of scholars within the field of Disaster Risk Reduction.

DRR is a highly interesting, intersectional field of study that has seen enormous progress in its paradigms, methodology and insights over the last decades. It has developed from applying a very technical, almost engineering-fanatic approach to adopting an interdisciplinary, holistic perspective as the basis of most of its analyses.

A fundamental paradigm change induced by long and intense debates occurred in the 1970s. The increasing recognition of the influence of human agency with regard to disasters led to a debate about basic terminology, most importantly the term "natural disasters". While this term is still used by many scholars in engineering or geography, it is commonly regarded as misleading or even wrong in the field of DRR. Events are only termed disasters, when they affect human civilization – otherwise they are just extreme natural processes. Thus, from the perspective of DRR, a natural[1] hazard interacts with human vulnerability to this hazard to create disaster risk (UNDHA, 1992). A common way to depict this relationship is through the equation:

***hazard * vulnerability = risk***

While the hazard cannot be controlled by humans, vulnerability can. Hence, this paradigm shift recognizes the immense potential for humans to lower risk by lowering vulnerability. Turner (1978) recognized this influence of human agency on disasters in "Man-Made Disasters".

On the basis of this basic equation, scholars of DRR have developed sophisticated models and risk indexes for accurate measurement of disaster risk (see the MOVE Framework by Birkmann et al., 2013). Moreover, vulnerability could contain all kinds of human-related factors, which also sparked a wave of outreach to other disciplines such as engineering or geography. In 2003, Turner specified the human factor in disasters with a dedicated framework for vulnerability analysis. In this framework, he recognizes the influence of larger structural factors – such as the political economy – on vulnerability in a certain place (Turner, 2003: p. 8076).

**Multi-factor vulnerability**

In more detail, many studies have looked at very specific factors of vulnerability, from which we can apply some to the coronavirus pandemic. By looking at some of the events / stages of the pandemic, these become visible. Note that the description of these events depicts my own understanding – they themselves require a much deeper analysis.

It is assumed that the virus originated in wild animals and was transmitted to humans first through a local meat market in Wuhan, China, where meat from these animals were sold (Fine Maron, 2020). Thus, the natural hazard in this case are new viruses developing in the wild – hardly controllable by humans at all. The vulnerability – interacting with this hazard in creating the

[1] Distinguished from technological / man-made hazards such as nuclear accidents.

disaster – is an aggregate of potential social, political, and economic factors that kicked in at different points in time:

1. Lax policy and controls due to corruption and a lack of capacity allowed unsafe or even prohibited meat to enter the market [political].
2. Hygiene standards and public information about the hazard were insufficient to prevent the transmission to humans on the market (ibid.) [social and political].
3. The virus interacted heavily with social divides in Wuhan (Sou-Jie Van Brunnersum, 2020). Generally, the economic situation can prevent persons from accessing necessary healthcare in time, which prolongs the recognition of the hazard as such [social and economic].
4. Local officials in Wuhan realized what was happening, but prevented information to reach the highest level of government (Wong, Barnes, Kanno-Youngs, 2020) [political, linked to 1.]
5. When the political elite was finally informed, they decided to downplay the risk at first. This could have been in order to prevent possible damages to their personal as well as the national reputation or to gain time to stock up on necessary equipment before other countries (Weissert, 2020) [political].
6. Many governments reacted too slowly or insufficiently to first local cases, partly due to economic considerations. This points to the fact that many sectors of government lacked understanding of the dangers and were tough to convince of an early response despite low numbers of cases (Pisano, Sadun, and Zanini, 2020, illustrate these dynamics using the case of Italy). Additionally, some economic activities lack sufficient social protection measures in most countries, which makes their complete stop impossible as they descend into illegal employment and the black market [economic, political].
7. A lack of stock of protective equipment meant that some administrative sectors had to close their services to the public before sufficient face masks and shields were available again [social, political].

This is a highly simplified, generalized and incomplete version of the events and a full analysis of the origin and spread of the virus is yet to be conducted. However, it shows that social, economic, and political factors interacted in the failure to contain the virus at various stages of the pandemic. Human vulnerability to natural hazards is often complex and reacting only through measures of engineering or by forcing people to follow rules more strictly will not stop the disaster[2].

Instead, DRR scholars call for a holistic, intersectional approach to the prevention, mitigation of and adaptation to disaster risk and impact. Every ministry or department of public administration, whether it concerns infrastructure, education, fisheries or arts&culture, has to think of potential implications of their regulations for the vulnerability of affected people to disaster risks. One straightforward example is that tourism regulations usually require some form of information delivered to tourists about risky areas in order to prevent exposure[3] to hazards (such as

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[2] In fact, similarly some engineering solutions to floods led to even worse impacts (see for example Hudson (2017), who describes the development of flood management measures in the Lower Rhine area).

[3] According to Birkmann et al. (2013), exposure is one of three defining factors of vulnerability, next to susceptibility/fragility and resilience/coping.

landslides, fires, floods or avalanches). In this particular case, the distribution of protective equipment throughout all public services is part of this streamlining of disaster preparedness.

Moreover, disaster risk reduction also interacts with other cross-cutting issues such as good governance. For example, earthquake risk is increased by administrative corruption, whereby building quality standards are ignored in cases of fraud or bribery (Alexander, 1997: 292; Green, 2005). Sichuan local officials redirected national funds for a school building, which collapsed during a major earthquake in 2008, reportedly killing 900 children (Lewis, 2008: 4). Thus, in both the coronavirus and this case, the autocratic, centralized system led to the unique role that local officials played in increasing disaster impact.

The pandemic also shows that international cooperation has to be part of this holistic approach to limit the impact of disasters that often travers national boundaries. A rapid response requires platforms for coordination and an open, timely flow of all available information.

Finally, the coronavirus pandemic also had other effects on fatalities and disasters, further proving the role of human agency in disaster risk reduction. Most prominently, crime rates dropped drastically during lockdown, while domestic violence increased (Jacoby, Stucka, and Phillips, 2020). On the other hand, regular disaster response became increasingly difficult as covid-19-measures limited the capacity of response teams (Wei-Haas, 2020).

**Conclusion**

Looking back at the two claims stipulated at the beginning, it became clear that institutional shortcomings were central to a delay in disaster response, be it due to local corruption or political systems heavily focused on economic growth. More evidently though, it is clear that while governments specialized units might have been prepared for a pandemic and gathered all the necessary knowledge in a timely manner, they were effectively powerless in implementing the necessary measures due to a lack of knowledge, equipment or will in other administrative units. This lack of streamlining disaster risk awareness and mitigation capacities into all sectors of public policy / administration is still a major factor in aggregating vulnerability to hazards and thus risk.

Author's note: While I would by far not consider myself an expert in DRR, I gained a good overview over the field during my Masters degree in public policy and applied some of its specific theorems in my thesis about the effects of significant earthquakes on anti-corruption policy in authoritarian regimes.[4]

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[4] My thesis can be accessed via the UM Master Theses Respository: https://repository.maastrichtuniversity.nl/islandora/object/um%3Ae926094c-5e00-470c-a701-4f56426e5084

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## Big Data, Privacy and COVID-19 – Learning from Humanitarian Expertise in Data Protection

*By Andrej Zwitter and Oskar Gstrein*

*We thank the authors for allowing us to republish this article. Some formatting changes were made. The original article can be found on the website of the Journal of Humanitarian Action.*

### Introduction

On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organization declared that the spread of COVID-19 has resulted in a global pandemic.[i] Since the virus gained international attention after its rapid spread in Hubei province in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in December 2019, it subsequently spread to other Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan. While some might argue that it was naïve of the 'Western World' to consider this crisis as a predominantly Asian problem for too long, the shutdown of large parts of society in practically all European countries and increasingly the rest of the world has made clear that this is a global crisis that affects all of us for much longer than expected. In this situation strong and decisive measures to save the lives and livelihoods of people across all parts of the world are needed.

However, more than ever before we are prepared to handle such crisis. Amongst others, Big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain technology can concretely help to deal with this emergency.[ii] For example, location data from mobile phone companies can help in determining and understanding movement patterns of individuals and groups to potentially give insight into how the virus spreads and whether instructions are complied with.[iii] Governments and private corporations are developing apps that allow users to share their whereabouts and social contacts on a voluntary basis.[ivv] Blockchain technology might be able to help keep a decentralised and cryptographically secure ledger of stocks and medication to create smart supply chain management.[vi] VR can help teachers explore new avenues of digital classrooms with new ways of interaction.[vii] Nevertheless, as promising as the use of these emerging technologies might be, it is important to note that their use comes with a digital footprint that invariably has consequences for data protection and privacy – on a global scale.[viii] Furthermore, political and corporate players might use the current situation to justify more intrusive data use for the future and for times after the pandemic is over.

This article will first discuss the potential and current use cases of location data for public order and specifically for getting the spread of COVID-19 under control. It will then outline concerns regarding ongoing practices. We will subsequently argue that these concerns are not mitigated by applicable data protection regimes or human rights norms due to their focus on the individual and respective derogation norms. In conclusion, we propose that guiding principles and standards for data practices in the humanitarian field are applicable during this crisis, and they should be considered as minimum standards for all states and corporations considering the use of data-driven monitoring tools to tackle the COVID-19 crisis.

### Location Data, Public Order and Control

When fighting a large-scale crisis such as a pandemic it is important for governments to understand why a threat is emerging, how the threat scenario develops, and whether the general population complies with measures for containment. Governments and research institutions need data to develop insights on these aspects, with location data being particularly attractive as work in the humanitarian sector has shown for many years by now.

When it comes to the use of location data sourced through mobile communication infrastructure and location services specifically, many commentators have been surprised by the fact that the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) co-developed a mobile phone application informing users whether they have been in close contact with someone infected by COVID-19.[ix] The insights presented by this app are based on the analysis of location data collected through phone networks, WiFi connections, satellite-based radio navigation system (e.g. GPS, GLONASS, Galileo) and other surveillance assemblages producing data that reveal the location of individuals and crowds. Furthermore, apps with maps to track the disease also became popular very quickly in Hong Kong,[x] and South Korea.[xi] In the PRC, this approach seems to have evolved into the 'Alipay Health Code', a system that classifies residents based on an opaque methodology. [xii]Once a survey has been filled out by a user, this data gets combined with other sources such as location data. Once the data has been analysed, a QR code is generated which has one of three colours; green enables its bearer to unrestricted movement, the 'owner' of a yellow code may be asked to stay home for seven days, and a red QR code results in two-weeks of quarantine.

In the meanwhile, the US government is in active talks with several large technology corporations such as Google and Facebook to explore venues how location data could be used to combat the pandemic, including tracking whether people are keeping one another at safe distances to counter the spread of the virus.[xiii] Google has already used the pandemic to show some of the advantages of omnipresent location tracking.[xiv] Finally, surveillance corporations such as Athena Security and the infamous spyware firm NSO advertise specialized surveillance cameras and dedicated data analysis services using location data to track the spread of the disease based on the movement of individuals and groups.[xv]

**Human Rights and Data Protection**

Right now, the temptation is very strong to do "whatever is necessary".[xvi] Undoubtedly, in times of crisis there is an increased need for governments to monitor and control the public, which might make it necessary to limit individual freedom. Such decisionism characterizes many emergencies. Constitutions and human rights, however, are designed with such crises in mind. Furthermore, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on the European level the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), are fully prepared to deal with such situations. Considering such developments from a formal perspective, it is useful to take a look at the legal and institutional framework of the Council of Europe (CoE). This international organization administers and controls one of the most important international human rights treaties guaranteeing individual freedoms, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The CoE has established procedures and case-law for times of crisis like the current one.[xvii]

The guide on Article 15 ECHR for derogations in times of emergency has been updated recently on 31 December 2019.[xviii] States may derogate in situations of:

- war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation,
- taking measures which are strictly required by the exigencies of the situation,
- and provided that measures are not inconsistent with other obligations under international law.

Furthermore, Article 4 of the ICCPR is similarly worded and beyond that requires state parties to report to all other parties via the UN Secretariat. Certain rights such as the right to life (except in respect of deaths resulting from lawful acts of war), the prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, the prohibition of slavery or servitude, and the rule of no punishment without law are non-derogable. However, many other rights are subject to derogation, including particularly the right to privacy, freedom of expression, the freedom of movement, as well as the freedom of assembly and association. Such derogations may only be of temporary nature.[xix]Both of these legal frameworks allow states for some flexibility by enabling them to temporarily derogate from some rights.

Data protection and privacy are human rights that can be derogated from during crisis. They can be temporarily reduced when a public emergency calls for it. What makes this situation even more complicated is the use of data from and by corporate agencies. Only mentioning the issue of over-dominant corporate power in the form of surveillance capitalism briefly,[xx] data ownership is in principle a matter of contract law and in many cases a question of terms of use that customers have to accept by default when intending to use a service. Particularly now, private corporations hold the key to using Big Data for tackling the corona crisis. Furthermore, typical data protection frameworks such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are focused on individual rights and individual consent. Hence, they leave out many aspects of collective autonomy as outlined below. In summary, standard data protection regimes and human rights law provide little protection for privacy and responsible data use during times of emergency.

**Potential concerns**

Over the last years much has been written about the balance between security and individual freedom, particularly on the false trade-off between privacy and security.[xxi] While a pandemic such as the spread of COVID-19 requires comprehensive measures, we must keep in mind that the use of location data and other (potentially) personally or demographically identifiable data on such scale results in the production of a 'data exhaust' that invariably has consequences. Just because it might be an emergency, does not mean that everything goes.

The arguably under-considered use of location data is surprising at this point when thinking about the unintentional revelation of the location and features of US military bases through the usage of the fitness app 'Strava' by members of the forces,[xxii] or recent work of the New York Times based on the analysis of a comprehensive set of pseudonymized mobile phone records that allowed to identify several prominent and influential individuals upon closer scrutiny.[xxiii] No executive powers enshrined in regulatory frameworks were necessary to acquire these datasets and carry out the analysis, which in itself shows that our societies lack appropriate governance frameworks for such practices. Not only effective oversight on the use of such data is missing, it is also open how individuals would be safeguarded against abuse, and which kind of remedies they could use to defend themselves. Considering this misuse of location data, the Federal Communications Commission in the US on 28 February 2020 proposed a fine of 200 million dollars for mobile phone network operators repackaging and reselling location data.[xxiv]

Furthermore, research over the past years has proven again and again that the combination of the production of unprecedented amounts of data and improving techniques to analyse large data sets are rendering most – if not all – state of the art practices to pseudonymize/anonymize datasets meaningless, at least as time moves on.[xxv] The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy has rightfully highlighted the risks resulting from the combination of 'closed' datasets with 'open' ones.[xxvi] In our work on Mobile devices as stigmatizing security sensors we have proposed the concept of 'technological gentrification' which describes our lives in environments that are permanently monitored and where those believing in the benefits of omnipresent data render the choices of others de-facto obsolete.[xxvii]

While a crisis like the coronavirus pandemic requires dedicated, quick and effective measures we must not forget that data is contextual. One and the same dataset can be sensitive in different contexts, and we need appropriate governance frameworks to make sure that this data is being generated, analysed, stored and shared in legitimate and responsible ways. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic location data might be very useful for epidemiological analysis. In the context of a political crisis, the same location data can threaten the rule of law, democracy and the enjoyment of human rights.

Luckily, some authorities across the world have already reacted to the potential threats resulting from the use of location data in order to tackle the current pandemic.[xxviii] On 16 March 2020 the European Data Protection Board released a statement in which chair Andrea Jelinek underlines that "[…] even in these exceptional times, the data controller must ensure the protection of the personal data of the data subjects.[xxix] Therefore, a number of considerations should be taken into account to guarantee the lawful processing of personal data. […]."

While these efforts are commendable, it would be preferable to have dedicated legal frameworks, created through democratic processes in parliaments, as well as transparent policies. Given the necessity to act quickly, one might at least expect governmental decrees or executive acts describing the means, objectives and undertaken practices in a detailed manner, rooted in proper legal basis and competences, including the establishment of oversight mechanisms. Instead, the current picture suggests that ad-hoc practices have to be justified by independent data protection authorities which have to compromise their long-term supervisory objectives for short-term support of the greater good.

**Humanitarian Guidelines for Data Responsibility**

Because of the lack of legal guidance in many instances, it is important to resort to best practices established in different fields, particularly in the domain of humanitarian action. Over the past decades the humanitarian community has developed extensive expertise on how to deal with data during crisis responsibly. One core player in this field is the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Its Centre for Humanitarian Data worked - together with many experts - on detailed guidance notes that help to deal with data responsibly.[xxx] This particularly concerns best practices in the cooperation between humanitarian, corporate and governmental stakeholders.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent published a detailed handbook on data protection in humanitarian action.[xxxi] This handbook covers everything from basic data protection principles, to questions of data sharing and data protection impact assessments (DPIA) in humanitarian contexts. Furthermore, Part II covers specific scenarios and data collection methods such as the use of mobile apps, biometrics and cloud services. These guidelines cover largely the same aspects as the OCHA guidelines. These concern particularly the fair data processing of vulnerable data subjects, data minimization as well as data retention and deletion.

Additionally, the Dutch Red Cross together with other Red Cross and Red Crescent societies initiated a group of expertise in the field of innovation and data science for humanitarian action, which issued the "510 Data Responsibility Policy".[xxxii] This policy introduces key principles such as:

(1) Data Protection,
(2) Legality and Legitimacy,
(3) Do No Harm,
(4) Respect for the Rights of Data Subjects (including access, rectification and erasure),
(5) Purpose Specification of Collected Data,
(6) Minimisation (collection on the basis of necessity and proportionality), and
(7) Data Quality as to accuracy, being up to date, valid, reliable and relevant.

Some of the key findings are that the data protection goes beyond the individual and includes vulnerable groups. This marks a shift from Personally Identifiable Data (PII) to Demographically Identifiable Data (DII).[xxxiii] Hence, data collection and utilization needs to follow the principle of proportionality and consider benefits and harms beyond individual interests. Furthermore, this thinking introduces a data lifecycle, which entails the stages of processing data from consideration of a potential data collection, over subsequent collection, to analysis and deletion of the data.

**Principles of Data Protection in Humanitarian Studies**

At this stage it should be emphasized that the academic community has not been idle. A discussion surrounding data ethics has been held quite vigorous over past years. It ranges from questions surrounding the use of "public data" (e.g. social media data), to biases, and includes considerations on nudging.[xxxiv] Experts in the field of humanitarian action, innovation governance and data protection have published extensively on utilities and risks of the use of 'big crisis data'.[xxxv] A specific use-case has been the domain of crisis mapping, with Ushahidi and Humanitarian OpenStreetMap launching these developments early on.[xxxvi]

Of particular note in the past years has been the Signal Code of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.[xxxvii] Its purpose is identification, definition and articulation of international Human Rights standards with regards to data and ICTs, as well as their translation into the humanitarian context. Like the principles of the 510 Data Responsibility, the Signal Code identifies a set of rights held by all data subjects including the protection of DII.

Some specific aspects of the Signal Code should be highlighted: The *right to information* refers to the right of all people to generate, access, acquire, transmit, and benefit from information during a crisis. The *right to protection* concerns protection from all harms that can arise from the misuse and unintended consequences of data and ICTs, given that crisis-affected populations are particularly vulnerable. *Privacy and security* as a right refers to internationally recognised legal, ethical and technical standards of data protection and privacy. The *right to data agency* relates to individual and collective agency with regards to collection, use and disclosure of PII and DII. Finally, *rectification and redress* of data is also a remedy that pertains to groups and individuals. A key element in all these points is not only the abstract existence and observance of these rights, but to enable effective application procedures for individuals and populations affected by crises. In other words, it obliges humanitarians to establish procedures to give effect to these rights and potential claims of affected people.

Further key areas of concern are:[xxxviii]

(1) the potential use of Big Data for unethical ends;
(2) the potential to mislead through reliance on unrepresentative and biased data;
(3) the various privacy and security challenges associated with data (including the danger data being tampered with),
(4) and the erosion of humanitarian principles by the exploitative use of data through corporate agents.

Eventually, profound questions around the meaningfulness of concepts such as individual consent and the nature of effective pseudonymization and anonymization remain. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the scope of this short piece to explore these in detail, but considerations on 'group privacy' and informational self-determination in the digital age would be potential starting points for such in-depth discussion.[xxxix] It needs to be reiterated that the humanitarian field is working on this subject extensively and with a mindset that is focused on using data responsibly, instead of mere compliance with regulatory frameworks, which need to resort to abstract human rights provisions too quickly since these frameworks themselves are limited in scope and application. Hopefully, this gap can be filled quickly in order to be able to fully focus on the containment of the pandemic, instead of additionally creating worries around the responsible use of data.

**Conclusion**

The use of location data to control the coronavirus pandemic can be fruitful and might improve the ability of governments and research institutions to combat the threat more quickly. It is important to note that location data is not the only useful data that can be used to curb the current crisis. Genetic data can be relevant for AI enhanced searches for vaccines and monitoring online communication on social media might be helpful to keep an eye on peace and security.[xl] However, the use of such large amounts of data comes at a price for individual freedom and collective autonomy. The risks of the use of such data should ideally be mitigated through dedicated legal frameworks which describe the purpose and objectives of data use, its collection, analysis, storage and sharing, as well as the erasure of 'raw' data once insights have been extracted. In the absence of such clear and democratically legitimized norms, one can only resort to fundamental rights provisions such as Article 8 paragraph 2 of the ECHR that reminds us that any infringement of rights such as privacy need to be in accordance with law, necessary in a democratic society, pursuing a legitimate objective and proportionate in their application.

However as shown above, legal frameworks including human rights standards are currently not capable of effectively ensuring data protection, since they focus too much on the individual as the point of departure. Hence, we submit that currently applicable guidelines and standards for responsible data use in the humanitarian sector should also be fully applicable to corporate, academic and state efforts which are currently enacted to curb the COVID-19 crisis globally. Instead of 're-calibrating' the expectations of individuals on their own expectations of privacy and collective autonomy, the requirements for the use of data should be broader and more comprehensive. Applicable principles and standards as developed by OCHA, the 510 project of the Dutch Red Cross, or by academic initiatives such as the Signal Code are valid minimum standards during a humanitarian crisis. Hence, they are also applicable minimum standards during the current pandemic.

Core findings that can be extracted from these guidelines and standards for the practical implementation into data driven responses to COVIC-19 are:

- **data sensitivity is highly contextual**; one and the same data can be sensitive in different contexts. Location data during the current pandemic might be very useful for epidemiological analysis. However, if (ab-)used to re-calibrate political power relations, data can be open for misuse. Hence, any party supplying data and data analysis needs to check whether data and insights can be misused in the context they are presented.

- **privacy and data protection are important values;** they do not disappear during a crisis. Nevertheless, they have to be weighed against respective benefits and risks.

- **data-breaches are inevitable**; with time (t) approaching infinity, the chance of any system being hacked or becoming insecure approaches 100%. Hence, it is not a question of whether, but when. Therefore, organisations have to prepare sound data retention and deletion policies.

- **data ethics is an obligation to provide high quality analysis;** using machine learning and big data might be appealing for the moment, but the quality of source data might be low, and results might be unreliable, or even harmful. Biases in incomplete datasets, algorithms and human users are abundant and widely discussed. We must not forget that in times of crisis, the risk of bias is more pronounced, and more problematic due to the vulnerability of data subjects and groups. Therefore, working to the highest standards of data processing and analysis is an ethical obligation.

The adherence to these principles is particularly relevant in times of crisis such as now, where they mark the difference between societies that focus on control and repression on the one hand, and those who believe in freedom and autonomy on the other. Eventually, we will need to think of including data policies into legal frameworks for state of emergency regulations, and coordinate with corporate stakeholders as well as private organisations on how to best deal with such crises. Data-driven practices have to be used in a responsible manner. Furthermore, it will be important to observe whether data practices and surveillance assemblages introduced under current circumstances will be rolled back to status quo ante when returning to normalcy. If not, our rights will become hollowed out, just waiting for the next crisis to eventually become irrelevant.

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## Drawing Good Out of a Bad Situation: Covid-19 and the Potential for Peace

*By Jonas Fiebrantz*

### Introducing: The Disruptive Virus

If I had one word to summarize the year so far, I might go with *disruptive*. The tragic consequences of the global pandemic are evident, and one certainly shouldn't take the loss of life lightly. Nevertheless, it is curious that, at least in my circles, more time is spent musing over the *reaction* to the virus than the virus itself. The severity and duration of lockdown measures, to mask or not to mask, impacts on travel and the global economy, these and many more questions are hotly debated and deliberated on. A solid case can be made that even phenomena like the Black Lives Matter protests were at least in part sparked by the rising tensions and unease produced in response to the virus situation. Arguably more widespread than the virus itself is a radical disruption of the status quo, of our conception of normality. This effect is visible at all levels of society. As individuals, our day-to-day lifestyle is uprooted. The way we work, shop, socialize or practice our faith are all affected. Towns and cities face challenges related to public transport, business and employment. Governments walk a proverbial tightrope in trying to respond effectively to the crisis while navigating political backlash. Internationally, travel and trade restrictions threaten to upset the global economic order, with major actors like China scrambling to come out on top. Conflict-affected regions also face disruption, with power dynamics shifting and international priorities changing. Unsurprisingly, humanitarian aid efforts have suffered in response to the virus.[i] People's responses to these developments can be loosely categorized in one of three archetypes. The fatalists focus on the damage done and have a grim outlook on the future, seeing the virus as an omen for worse things to come. The idealists insist that the unconquerable human spirit will prevail and forecast better things, for example in terms of environmental restoration. Finally, the pragmatists take a more balanced approach to current events and prioritize proactive action over abstract speculation. My intention with this commentary is to insist upon the value of this last approach, specifically in the context of peace work. The claim is simple: The disruptive impact of Covid-19 has impacted conflict landscapes, enabling both positive and negative transformation thereof. Therefore, there is an opportunity, moral imperative and challenge for those involved to step in and push the scales in the direction of peace.

### A Little Bit of Theory: Conflict Ripeness

One of my favorite theories that I came across during my studies is Zartman's Ripeness Theory. Like all great concepts, it is simultaneously common-sensical and yet provokes us to think in a novel way. The idea is simple: when it comes to finding peaceful alternatives to violence in a conflict, one of the most important factors is timing. What Zartman shows is that there are specific moments, sometimes very brief, when a conflict is 'ripe' for attempting reconciliation. Without getting too technical, a ripe moment is one when the fighting parties find themselves in a 'Mutually Hurting Stalemate' (MHS). *"When the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons), they seek an alternative policy or Way Out."*[ii] Basically, the conflict is 'ripe' when the cost-reward ratio of continued fighting is perceived as too high to be acceptable, making more peaceful alternatives more attractive. An incredibly simplistic example would be two children fighting over the last cookie. The mother intervenes with an ultimatum: If they keep fighting, neither gets the cookie. If they make peace, they get to share the cookie. Logically speaking (though perhaps not entirely realistic), the children would recognize that the cost of fighting is too high, with no real chance of 'winning'. Instead, they would devote their energies to negotiating how much of the cookie each person gets, with the mother serving as mediator. What causes an MHS to come into being? Zartman notes that these moments are often associated *"with an impending, past or recently avoided catastrophe"*, some sort of circumstance or development that drastically raises the perceived cost of continued violence, either materially or politically. A disruptive event that upsets the dynamics and principles that underlie the conflict. Now, where on Earth could we find such a crisis?

**Covid-19 and Conflict: An Unpredictable Recipe**

What happens when a country, bogged down in a years-long conflict, is hit by a global pandemic? "Nothing good" may be your immediate response. And indeed, the situation often seems dire. In Syria, for instance, the war-torn region is facing severe starvation concerns due to the combination of economic sanctions, destroyed infrastructure, and rising food prices in reaction to the virus. Additionally, with more than half of its hospitals out of service for lack of medical supplies or an intact building, the suffering population is entirely unprepared for the crisis.[iii] What do we make of these circumstances? Once again, the three archetypes make their appearance. To the fatalist, things are only going to get worse, with the added damage of the virus merely accelerating a cycle of feuding and suffering, as in Myanmar.[iv] The idealist, though saddened by the damage done, looks with hopefulness at the signs of solidarity and grudging rapprochement, like the agreed ceasefire in Yemen.[v] The pragmatist takes a different approach. Rather than musing about the 'invisible hand' determining whether a conflict will be pushed farther into chaos or towards parley, the pragmatist believes in taking action. They recognize that far from being a product of uncontrollable factors or pure chance, the direction the parties to a conflict take are a product of the actors involved. Actors which, given the correct method, can be persuaded to embrace one option over another. As the proverb puts it: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."[vi]

**Framing the Situation: Opportunity, Imperative, Challenge**

For those truly interested in peace, the situation can be framed in three dimensions: as an opportunity, a moral imperative, and a challenge. Most obviously, the 'ripeness' of the moment can be seen as a great opportunity for those strategically placed to make use of it. National activists and politicians, regional mediators and third parties, and international humanitarian groups are all suited to take advantage of the context to gain a foothold with the conflicting groups. This can come in the form of a friendly proposal for a 'way out' of the stalemate, or in a more negative form like political pressure to for the sides to stand down. More on the exact strategy later. Naturally, these MHSs are a double-sided sword, and many actors that profit off conflict may also see this as an opportunity for pursuing more harmful actions. For instance, it stands to reason that the scarcity of certain vital resources such as medicine or food may provide incentives for malicious power plays. A second frame is that of moral imperative. Beyond merely being a convenient option, the decision to intervene for the sake of peace also amounts to a duty. By definition, a Mutually Hurting Stalemate involves the active suffering of not only the culprits, but the victims of the conflict as well. Ultimately, those suffering the most from the virus are the civilians who are already under pressure from the fighting itself. As such, one cannot look at the situation coldly. While the ethical duty is self-evident for human rights organizations, it exists for state actors as well, thanks to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).[vii] Even if the virus itself is not severe enough to invoke such international obligation, the potential for escalated conflict and additional harm against particularly vulnerable groups provides good reason for peaceful intervention. This point may be disputed on legal grounds, but I would assert it to be *morally* self-evident. Finally, the situation can be looked at as a challenge for the peace-seeking community. In some sense, the escalation vs. peace dichotomy becomes a conflict in its own right, fought not with weapons but with political leverage. Often finding themselves as the underdogs, peace advocates need to work hard to keep the scales tipped in favor of reconciliation in opposition to those seeking further violence. This leads to the final key question: how exactly would one go about promoting peaceful alternatives to violence in light of the ongoing catastrophe and the complex realities of different conflict-contexts?

**Strategies for Peace: Balancing Principle and Practice**

Naturally, outlining a universal peace strategy is an impossible, and frankly unnecessary task. For those interested, there is plenty of literature on mediation, negotiation, conflict sensitivity and other peacebuilding tactics elsewhere. At the end of the day, what is needed is a unique context-specific action plan, a product of 'the moral imagination', to quote Lederach.[viii] Nevertheless, a broad range of approaches can be outlines. First and perhaps most effectively, those in positions of power can make use of realpolitikal methods. Most commonly employed by states, these methods work on a basis of pure interest calculation. They can range from passively persuading the parties of the strategic advantages of agreeing to negotiate to actively exerting pressure through economic or political leveraging. The unilateral Saudi-lead ceasefire in Yemen serves as an example of this.[ix] The defining element of this approach is that it doesn't try to take a moral high ground. Even if the end goal is moral in nature, the method is based on cold hard rationality. In sharp contrast, there is also the humanitarian approach. These methods, employed frequently by less politically powerful actors like human rights organizations, appeal explicitly to moral principles. This can take the form of international advocacy or local grassroots initiatives, but the common thread is an appeal to principle rather than calculation. The conflicting parties ought to cease fighting out of moral duty to those suffering under the virus conditions, especially, but not exclusively, to their own citizens. One example of such an approach is a recent appeal by a group of churches and humanitarian organizations in the USA for the government to reduce harsh economic sanctions on countries subject to the virus.[x] While the realpolitikal approach suffers on principle, the humanitarian approach's weakness lies in its practical ineffectiveness. The sad reality is that powerful governments and other conflict parties are rarely moved by pure altruism. Nevertheless, a humanitarian approach may still harm their political image and local backing, thereby indirectly providing a self-interested incentive to comply. In reality, most efforts at provoking reconciliation tend to find a middle point between the two extremes: seeking effective methods that do not compromise on fundamental moral convictions.

**Conclusion: Being Optimistically Pragmatic**

When it comes to the future for conflicts after the virus, much is unclear. It is tempting to slip into either fatalism or idealism, being content to make passive claims about abstract trends beyond anyone's control. The more challenging, but I believe more rewarding, route is pragmatism. Instead of accepting our helplessness in the aftermath of a global pandemic, the peace-seeking community ought to be doubly proactive, renewing efforts to bring the fighting to an end. What better testament to the strength of the human spirit than to draw peace out of the jaws of global catastrophe? And who knows? If the opportunity is rightly seized, we may look back at 2020 as a good year after all.

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## About fears, trust and divisions

*By Peter Knoope*

There is an interesting predictability in responses to crises. The COVID-19 crisis is not an exception. Even though this crisis is different in scope and reach. It is not only genuinely global and affects the smallest village and the biggest city, it is also multi-faceted because what started as a health crisis now also leads to an economic crisis at a global level.

In the first stages of a threatening situation like the current health crisis, the fear leads to a call for strong leadership. People look for guidance. The fearful want to know that a powerful leader is going to confront the causes and that their leader is bringing them back into safer waters. In the initial stages the public support for tough measures and strong leadership runs high. Those who are threatened unite in support of the leadership. Fear leads to unity and trust.

We have seen all of this happening over the last months. The examples are known. Artists united to bond. People sang from their balconies. Communities came together to support the elderly and healthcare workers. Suddenly the citizens of the world felt united and solidarity was in the air. It reminded me of the sixties. The world rediscovered `*care*`. Some of my friends refer to that period in February, March and even April as an inspirational and positive period.

But the solidarity had limitations. Countries closed their borders and withdrew in isolated national units, international travel and trade slowed down, the international players like the WHO got a full blow of criticism, businesses saw their activities reduced, markets closed, jobs got lost. The economic costs of the health crisis started to show and governance weaknesses were laid bare. A new crisis and new anxieties emerged. Economic actors, the business owners, started to look at the same leadership for guidance and answers. Many politicians tried, as best as they could, to help out and confront the second crisis. But the solidarity in the business community was limited. Solidarity is not part of their DNA. The divisions became visible.

Today protesters are marching towards the Serbian Parliament. Anti-lockdown demonstrations have become daily business in the USA, students organise Corona parties to show contempt for the disease and the measures, the list of signs of the ending support and solidarity is long. The singing on balconies is over. The care for the elderly vanished. The leadership is questioned, the unity is gone.

And all of this is part of the predictability of the responses to crisis. There is a backlash after the initial unifying effect of a crisis. After the initiate solidarity criticism runs high. Critical questions are asked. Academics knew of a useful and effective alternative to the measures. Politicians had a better plan and demand an investigation. Journalists expose the criticism of others and feed into the atmosphere of distrust. The third crisis announces itself. The crisis of distrust.

It looks like we are in the midst of the third crisis. A complicating factor in the present situation is that the first one, the health crisis and the second one, the economic crisis, are far from resolved. We are in the middle of a perfect storm with not less than three crises competing for attention. Three crises that need to be carefully managed at the same time. A very challenging situation that requires much more leadership and governance than seems to be at hand. There are challenges at the national level in some countries, but the trust crisis is not limited to national governance. International architecture is shaking as well.

Here are some of the challenging elements that need fixing to get out of this combination of three crises and to prevent the next one.

### 1. Political paradigms

There is a piece on the website of Al Jazeera under the title `Is this the end of Capitalism?`. The piece is three months old. But it is still featured there. Al Jazeera doesn`t want to take it down. There is a reason for that. Many people repeat after Al Jazeera that the introduction of market principles in health care is at least part of the problem, that the market economy is a misfit with global crises like a pandemic and the upcoming climate crisis, that capitalism has become its own enemy, produces divides and the wrong incentives. The global call for decolonisation, as an unforeseen by-product of the social tensions resulting from lockdowns is another indicator that the youth is calling for a new and attractive political paradigm. The post cold war political landscape is ready for a remake. But the alternative set up is vague. It is easy to declare the end of capitalism, just like we did with Marxism some thirty years ago. It is easy to call for decolonisation. But it is all negative. Where is the alternative? What does a decolonised world order look like? If market mechanisms are a no go to prevent the next crisis than what mechanism does? Such a persisting advocates of market mechanisms as the silver bullet, the solution to everything, should not please themselves. The lack of an alternative doesn`t fix the problem. On the contrary. It leaves a new generation frustrated, politically homeless and alienated. Ingredients for revolt. There is an urgent need for a mobilising positive political paradigm. A paradigm that should take **values** as a point of departure, **care** as a central theme and **humanity** and **sustainability** as an inspiration for policies. We need such an attractive political paradigm to mobilise the intellectual (and other) capital to get out of the crises.

### 2. Conspiracy

The current crisis has provoked a high level of conspiracy thinking. The reasoning behind it is that after all such an *evil killer bug* must come from somewhere and for some reason. The popularity of conspiracy thinking is a result of the distrust of the messenger. Conspiracy thinking takes root where people feel that the elite, those who are in power, the academics, have an agenda of their own. An agenda that doesn`t seek the interest of `the people` but the interest of the elite. In the current situation they come from many different corners. There are those who claim that the Chinese produced the virus to damage the West. There are those that claim that the virus is a punishment from a God. There are those who are certain that the virus is a by-product of our way of life, a signal of nature to warn us. There are those who claim that the virus has in some complicated manner to do with the 5G network and that it is all meant to create an excuse to vaccinate all of us and inject everyone with microscopic chips. The fact is that these conspiracy theories are about a natural response to anxiety. If you can`t get your head around a phenomenon and you don`t trust the people that are positioned to fix it, you are bound to invent an explanation that makes sense in your believe structure. What is worrying is the level of support for these conspiracy theories, the proliferation of them and the way these theories are sometimes supported by officials from a number of countries to create divisions and revolts. **Debunking** conspiracy theories, **demasking** the messengers and rebuilding **trust** are important elements of the solution and the escape route from the trust deficit that hinders to exit this crisis and to prevent the next one.

### 3. Economy vs health

The relation between healthcare and the economy seems complex. Since the second world war the understanding of economy has almost become equivalent to pursuing *growth.* The current crisis is, In that light, an economic disaster. The growth has become negative. People were worried about this negative growth. They grew up in a frame where reduction of economic activity is to be avoided at any cost. The pressure on governments to `open up` and `restart` the economy has been tremendous as a result. There was resistance against the restrictions on mobility and productivity because the prospect of reduction of growth was hard to accept. It is however correct to question the supposed tensions or even assumed contradictions between public health on one side and the economy on the other. First of all, if too many people fall ill the healthcare system gets overloaded and will fail the patients. When that happens on a large scale productivity will drop. Proper, well organised healthcare is a condition for productivity. Secondly it is false to claim that the economy has growth as an objective. The objective of the economy is wellbeing. Keeping economic activity going at any cost, despite the potential health consequences is based on a deep misconception and misunderstanding of the reasons why there is economic activity in the first place. The economy is not an autonomous self-serving machinery. It is not here to serve itself. It is not there to keep it going. It serves the society, it facilitates services like education, security and health. Putting the economy first and people's health second is putting the world upside down or inside out. The success of an economy can only be measured by the well-being of the people that work in that economic reality. This current crisis exposes the weakness of our understanding of what economy is. **Re-calibrating the concept and objectives of economy** is key to exiting the crisis. Including future crises.

### 4. Generational divide

When I visit my favourite local restaurant in Bamako, in Mali, I get greeted in the most polite way. They will call me grandfather. A sign of respect. Elders are highly respected in most of the world. The elders have lived, gained knowledge and expertise, can guide you with their wisdom. They have relevant luggage. This is not the case in the Western world. The elders are no longer useful in a world that values tomorrow over yesterday. The elders have no use in the market and productivity oriented societal concept. A team of ethics experts advised the Dutch government that if the medical system would get overloaded and hard choices would have to be made, the Medicare should prioritise youth over aged. The reasoning is that youth has more time ahead of them. The cynicism of that reasoning was not clear to them. You waste experience to safe inexperience. To put it bluntly, you do away with wisdom to keep foolishness. If anything, the current health crisis has laid bare the lack of respect for elders and their relevance to society. The death toll of the virus in the Netherlands alone stands at over 9000. In the midst of this health crisis and loss of lives four young surfers died on the Dutch coast on a windy day. The national mourning over those four was impressive. Flowers, commemorations, emotions ran high. Nothing of the kind happened to mourn the nine thousand. It is may be too easy to claim that this was only because of the age of the victims. But old people have noticed the difference in the way society pays respect to young victims of natural phenomena and the elders that died of a disease. Dividing lines in a society are an ingredient for anxiety and tensions. It is important to be aware and reduce these divides. Youngsters are an important part of a societal set up. A new generation takes up new challenges. Rooted in the experience and wisdom of the elders. Value both. **A society that ignores the added value of every individual is in danger of polarisation**. If anything, this health crisis has exposed the weakness of Western societies that don`t value their own experience and history. It goes without saying that both polarisation and ignorance of expertise and history are ingredients for political and societal disasters.

### 5. National units vs globalised governance

Schiphol, the Dutch national airport was deserted for months in February, March April and May of this year. The skies were quite for a change. The Netherlands wasn`t the only country in the world that was closed off. The cover of the Economist featured a picture of the world with a sign saying `Closed`. National borders suddenly became very relevant. No trespassing. The measures were national. Nations suddenly mattered. National stockpiles of medical gear mattered. There is an interesting tension between this rediscovering of the nation state and the ongoing process of globalisation. Does this crisis mean that globalisation will be questioned? Will this crisis mark the beginning of an era of renewed nationalism? Will the shock of discovering that we depend on others for medical equipment and medicines (and so for survival) invoke a new caution for interdependency and a return to nationalism? And if that is the case where does multilateralism stand? If so, it requires **re-thinking and redefining the added value of international cooperation and multilateralism**. A challenge that will proof to be bigger under the present day political sky. Some countries will continue to put themselves and their own interest first. That in itself is a threat for the smaller players that rely on international trade and cooperation. Be assured that, if not the contemporary, certainly the next crisis can only be avoided trough international cooperation.

### 6. World order and the powers are shaking things up

Our world order is based on the Westphalian model of the State. The model dates back some four hundred years. The way that these States are run is heavily influenced and guided by the principles developed some two hundred years ago during the French revolution. This system is strengthened by guidelines laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that is only seventy years old. Since some time the Westphalian idea of the State monopoly on violence, as defined four hundred years ago, is challenged. It is hard to set a date as to when that began exactly but the struggle to end colonial domination that spread from India into Africa after WWII was relevant for this development. Since that era, preserving the security of the State, in response to these challenges, has become a major component of government policies. Securitization made its appearance on the world stage. In the last two decades, since nine eleven, securitization has become an ever more important element of State activities. The rule of law, privacy, human rights have come to suffer as a result. The system is shaking.

Today at least three superpowers are less and less inclined to take the principles of the French Revolution and the 1948 UDHR as compelling guiding principles for State behaviour. On the contrary. Authoritarianism and State control over citizens is rapidly becoming the new normal. Only a small minority of people in the planet live in old fashioned, rule of law based, democracies. In the greater part of the countries of this world citizens are increasingly scrutinized out of security considerations. The question is whether COVID-19 will be a trigger to reverse the trend or whether it will increase an existing tendency towards more securitization. The pandemic has turned every single citizen into a potential victim and also into a potential killer. There is good reason to track and trace the patients. There is good reason to reduce mobility and to get an idea of who was in contact with who, where and how long. To the benefit of the citizens. Just like we gave up privacy to improve our security after nine-eleven. There is sufficient reason for concern.

We should prevent further erosion of the gains of the past. We should **reverse the trend of securitization** and return to why the State as an entity was created as a concept in Westphalia some four hundred years ago. To protect us, the citizens. Not to protect itself, the State.

**Conclusion**

The current crises uncovers some fundamental flaws and weaknesses of our global order. We may very well be on a crossroad. New crises are around the corner. To build resilience we need to analyse the weakness and repair the mistakes. We need leadership and courage. Innovation and inclusion. Fear is not going to do the job. Polarisation and divisions are going to hinder resilience. We need to overcome our fears and build trust. We need leadership and courage to make the changes that are needed.

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# CHAPTER II

# COVID-19 AS AN INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON

**A Comment**
by Robert Keohane

**The Corona Pandemic and a Global Parliament**
by Andreas Bummel

**Covid-19 puts the Spotlight on International Law and Human Rights**
by Birgit Toebes

**Internationalizing the Crisis**
by Joseph Stiglitz

**Interview with Prof. Dr. Jan Pronk**

**Corona Pandemic: Six International Trends**
by Kees van Rij

## A Comment

*By Robert Keohane (3 May, 2020)*

We need more global cooperation, and more effective outreach on health issues to developing countries, preferably orchestrated by an international organization such as WHO and/or a public-private partnership such as GAVI. We also need farsighted economic policies that will help the world economy, and especially developing countries, avoid disaster.

However, such cooperation will not stem from altruistic behavior by leaders of rich and powerful countries. These leaders are accountable both to their publics and to national corporate and security elites, who seek distributional benefits for themselves. It is a platitude of political science that, on the whole, publics and leaders pursue their own interests. When they cooperate – as major capitalist countries did on trade and financial issues for 70 years after the end of World War II – they do so because they expect to benefit. Protectionism yielded to liberal trade when conceptions of self-interest changed, not when countries altruistically sought to help others by lowering their barriers to imports.

Likewise, persuading powerful elites to cooperate more fully, and to share public health benefits with poor and weak countries, will require showing them that their own interests are at stake. The strongest argument for broad and deep global public health cooperation is that globalization makes inevitable global transmission of new and dangerous communicable diseases. Vaccines against specific known diseases will not protect against the next SARS, Ebola, or COVID-19. Cooperation will be fostered more effectively by people with a realistic understanding of how self-interest can generate cooperation than by those who rely on altruism.

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## The Corona Pandemic and a Global Parliament

*By Andreas Bummel*

*We thank the author for allowing us to republish this op-ed. Some formatting changes were made. The original article can be found on the website of the GlobalPolicyJournal.*

The coronavirus pandemic is yet another case that demonstrates the limits of international collaboration in dealing with global challenges. A reform and strengthening of the UN and the system of global governance should now be put on the agenda. A UN Parliamentary Assembly does not only represent a first step towards a global parliament, it would provide an important layer of accountability in global affairs and may act as an engine for change.

The global coronavirus pandemic brings home the realization that all human beings on this planet are interconnected and share a common home. A virus knows no borders. In the same way greenhouse gas in the atmosphere knows no borders. Global warming and the climate crisis affects everybody, including future generations. But for many this insight is still very abstract. The pandemic, however, makes global interconnectedness tangible at an individual level, in the shared experience of lockdown and loss.

This shared global experience stands in stark contrast to the practice of international politics. The coronavirus pandemic is a global threat but there is no coherent global response. There is a scale mismatch. The scale and impact of environmental, social, health, economic, financial and technological systems that need to be managed are increasingly global and interconnected, but our political instruments are based on separate nation-states and a spaghetti bowl of dozens of intergovernmental organizations and forums. The UN and WHO are not independent entities with authority to deal with matters of global concern. They are instruments of their member states. When governments are unwilling or unable to support common action, their hands are tied.

For decades there has been broad consensus that institutional reform is needed, in particular with regard to the composition, decision-making and working methods of the UN Security Council. But there is no agreement on an alternative model. The fact that the council has so far been unable to play a role in the pandemic response is another blow to its relevance and legitimacy. At the same time, the UN General Assembly is struggling to remain relevant, amid ritualistic and overly formalized procedures and routines leading to non-binding resolutions that are not often respected.

Even before the outbreak of the pandemic there was talk of a crisis of multilateralism in view of geopolitical tensions, the UN's liquidity crisis, the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris climate agreement and its boycott of the World Trade Organization's appelate body for dispute settlements. Then at the height of the pandemic President Trump announced that the US will stop funding the WHO.

Multilateralism may be in a crisis, but going back to the old normal is not enough. Multilateralism is always on the brink of crisis, as it relies on voluntary collaboration. Radical rethinking is necessary. A more lethal virus could break out, either naturally, intentionally, or by accident. The climate crisis has not been checked. The threat of nuclear weapons persists. There is a plethora of global risks and challenges that need attention.

Two years ago, 82 percent of respondents in a ten-country survey across world regions said that the UN needs to be reformed to better address present and future global challenges. 69 percent agreed that a supranational organization should be able "to make enforceable global decisions to address global risks". This sentiment needs to be translated into popular political pressure. Global institutions must be vested with the power they need to manage global threats and global commons. They need independent legitimacy, authority and funding.

Many workable proposals have been suggested. Overviews can be found in Joseph Schwartzberg's Transforming the United Nations System, and the book Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century, published a few months ago by Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur Dahl and Maja Groff.

The long-term goal may involve a comprehensive reform treaty negotiated in the framework of a charter review conference that establishes a new world organization and replaces today's fragmented and weak UN system. An indispensable element of any such world organization would be a global parliament to represent the world's citizens, as Jo Leinen and I pointed out in our recent book.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of everyone to take part in public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Now that public affairs are global, such as management of the global commons, citizens must claim their right to global democracy.

Intergovernmental bodies, where representation of citizens is intermediated through career diplomats appointed by the executive branches of member states, do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy for universally binding decision-making powers, even if strictly limited to matters of global concern.

They need to be complemented by a parliamentary body, composed of citizen-elected representatives who are accountable to their constituents, not their national government. Global regulation should no longer be left to diplomats, experts and technocrats alone. There should be political evaluation, mediation and accountability. In particular, the need for global taxation to fund global institutions does not work without a parliament - no taxation without representation.

The allocation of seats in a global parliament should correspond to population size. This leads us to a future UN that Václav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, advocated twenty years ago at the UN's Millennium Summit: one that is based on a bicameral system with an assembly of member state representatives and another elected by the world's citizens.

First steps are possible right now, given political will. Using its authority to establish subsidiary bodies, the UN General Assembly could create a UN Parliamentary Assembly that has rights of information, oversight and participation, without the need for Charter reform or Security Council approval. Instead of direct elections, this assembly, as a first pragmatic step, could be made up of national parliamentarians, including members of the opposition where there is one.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke of a trust deficit disorder two years ago. Adding a UN Parliamentary Assembly to the UN's structure would address this crisis of trust in the UN. Yet despite first being proposed in 1949, and gaining widespread support since the launch of an international campaign in 2007, most member states still haven't looked into the proposal for a UN Parliamentary Assembly. They often hide behind the UN's collaboration with the Inter-

Parliamentary Union, a different body with a different purpose. On this 75th anniversary of the UN, reflecting on "the future we want, the UN we need", it is time for member states to fully engage with the UN Parliamentary Assembly proposal.

If a UN Parliamentary Assembly existed, it could respond to recent calls for an independent international investigation and look into the causes, responses and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the performance of international institutions such as the UN and the WHO.

The assembly could set up an ad hoc inquiry committee and hear testimony from a variety of international civil servants, experts and civil society representatives from across the world. With public hearings, based on its diverse membership, it would create more transparency and accountability. The lack of adequate parliamentary capacity of this kind at the global level constitutes a major democratic and governance deficit that must be addressed.

What the world is perhaps missing most is an effective engine for political change that helps overcome decades of impasse. We need to build an institutional path that leads to a peaceful, just and sustainable world. A UN Parliamentary Assembly could be this engine.

In her 1965 introduction to a preliminary draft of a world constitution Elisabeth Mann Borgese wrote:

"When foreign affairs, the crushing issues of war and peace in a technologically shrinking, increasingly interdependent world, begin to outweigh internal affairs, and domestic policy becomes largely determined by foreign policy, the democratic process is doomed to be stifled and choked. To be rescued, to survive even on the domestic plane, the democratic process must be carried over from the internal to the international sector. Foreign policy must be internationalized and carried out, not by diplomats representing the executive, but by representatives of the people in international bodies of deliberation."

Closing borders and retreating behind the walls and fences of nation-states is not a solution – it is a recipe for disaster.

*Andreas Bummel is co-founder and director at Democracy Without Borders and leads the international campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. He is author of the internationally praised book "A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century" in which he provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and prospects of democratic world governance.*

## Covid-19 puts the spotlight on international law and Human Rights

*By Birgit Toebes*

Dear students,

Over the past months Covid-19 has forced you to stay at home and to think locally. Yet we should not lose sight of the international dimensions of this crisis. For students of international affairs in particular, it is important to realize that this crisis is very much a matter of international law. Two regimes are of specific importance in this crisis: the International Health Regulations of the World Health Organization (2005) and international human rights law. In this contribution I will discuss their nature and their specific relevance in this crisis, as well as their interaction.

**International Health Regulations**

Countries have been working together for a century and a half when it comes to fighting infectious diseases. Since the 19th century, international "sanitary" regulations have been in place to combat infectious diseases. The coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) is regulated by the recent International Health Regulations (IHR) of the World Health Organization (WHO), which have been binding on all countries in the world since 2007.

The new Regulations are innovative because of their open formulation ('all-hazards approach'): the instrument covers all threats to public health, not just a limited list of diseases. Thus, even a terrorist attack with anthrax, or the leakage of chemicals, could fall within it if there is a threat to public health. Such a situation has occurred six times since the adoption of the revised IHR: influenza in Mexico (2009); Ebola in West Africa (2014); polio in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria (2014); zika in South America (2016); Ebola in Congo (2018); and now COVID-19 in China.

In case of an outbreak, the country concerned should inform the WHO within 24 hours, after which the WHO may declare that there is presence of a 'public health emergency of international concern'. Compared to the slow response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, Covid-19 marked an improvement: within a month, the outbreak was world news and action was taken.

After such a declaration, the WHO makes recommendations to the country concerned. It is important to note that the IHR do not allow for the imposition of coercive measures to enforce these recommendations. It is quite possible that in future scenarios more coercive action will have to be taken, i.e. when countries refuse to follow up on the recommendations. This is where the compromise that the IHR reflect is avenged. The WHO should have more legal and financial resources to take more compelling steps. As long as the IHR are a compromise text and the WHO receives insufficient funding, with a large part of the donated money earmarked for specific purposes, its scope for manoeuver remains limited. In fact, the WHO has the expertise to be the major player when it comes to such outbreaks, but it lacks the means and the resources.

**Human Rights law**

Covid-19 has emphasized the importance of human rights in global and domestic health settings. We can also say that in essence, Covid-19 reflects a crisis of human rights. With international human rights law, we refer to the binding and non-binding standards that have been adopted after World War II. The first instrument that was adopted was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), a non-binding yet authoritative instrument which set the stage for the adoption of a wide range of human rights treaties and non-binding explanatory documents over the past 70 years.

In human rights law, we recognize two main types of human rights: civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. They are laid down in two core UN treaties in particular: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). Many of the rights in these treaties have been under pressure in this crisis, including freedom of movement, expression and assembly, as well as the rights to life, health and privacy. For example, lockdowns are at tension with freedom of movement, while a lack of adequate care for patients with Covid as well as for regular patients is at tension with the right to health.

In essence, this crisis has been very much about balancing the protection of public health against civil and political human rights such as privacy, physical integrity and freedom of movement. There has been much debate as to whether the restrictions on these civil and political rights had an adequate basis in the law, and whether they were proportionate and subsidiary: does the public health interest require infringement and is there no lighter measure available?[i] Medical scientific evidence about the nature and infectiousness of the disease plays a major role here, but also economic and social insights may have to be taken into the mix.

Yet, countries also have the discretion to temporarily set aside these rights in the event of a general emergency. A number of countries have made use of the possibility to temporarily 'derogate' from human rights, implying that rights to privacy, physical integrity, freedom of movement, speech and assembly can be set aside completely (with some other rights, including the prohibition of torture, being non-derogable).[ii] UN experts have warned that declaring a state of emergency should not be used to circumvent human rights.[iii]

It seems premature to pass a harsh judgment on the different approaches countries are taking now. In time, we will be able to make a better estimate of how these interventions relate to international human rights standards. Such a human rights analysis will teach us a lot about how to respond in future scenarios. In conclusion, a human rights-based approach should be a standard component of interventions aimed at combating infectious diseases.

**Regime interaction**

In my view, it is important to study how the IHR and international human rights law interact, in particular when it comes to States' preparedness to future public health emergencies. After all, the most important thing is that we are able to respond adequately to new outbreaks in the future. In light of the 'all hazards' approach under the IHR, such an outbreak could have a wide variety of causes, including for example the detrimental health effects of climate change.

It seems that there are considerable parallels between States' obligations to have 'core capacities' under the IHR, and their 'minimum core obligations' under the human right to health. The State obligation to build core capacities under the IHR is aimed at preparing States to respond adequately to a public health emergency. IHR's core capacities are identified under Articles 5, 13, Annex I, and in a considerable amount of subsequent technical documentation. Article 13 requires States parties to develop within five years 'the capacity to respond promptly and effectively to public health risks and public health emergencies of international concern'.

Likewise, the human rights framework stipulates that States parties have 'a core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights enunciated in the Covenant, including essential primary health care'.[iv] CESCR General Comment 14 on the right to health identifies a set of core obligations, four of which are particularly relevant to the Covid-19 crisis, including the obligation to 'adopt and implement a national public health strategy and plan of action (…).[v] While this definition of the core in the right to health remains open-ended, the comprehensive IHR framework gives more detail to the open-ended wording under the right to health framework when it comes to designing responses to public health crises.[vi] We must therefore study these regimes in conjunction with each other, and identify how they can reinforce one another.[vii]

**Your role as future international agents**

For studying all these challenges I count on you as a new generation of international lawyers, officials and agents more generally. I wish you lots of luck with your studies and with your other endeavours, and I sincerely hope that life will go back to normal for you as soon as possible.

With kind regards,

*Brigit Toebes*

*Prof Brigit Toebes holds the Chair of Health Law in a Global Context at the Faculty of Law of the University of Groningen. She is a legal scholar with twenty-five years of experience in the international standards protecting health, with a strong emphasis on the role of human rights in health promotion and disease prevention.*

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[vii] See also my ESIL Reflection 'States' resilience to future health emergencies: connecting the dots between core obligations and core capacities'; Vol. 9, Issue 2.

## Internationalizing the Crisis

*By Joseph E. Stiglitz*

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As it spread from one country to another, the novel coronavirus paid no attention to national frontiers or "big, beautiful" border walls. Nor were the ensuing economic effects contained. As has been obvious since the outset, the COVID-19 pandemic is a global problem that demands a global solution.

In the world's advanced economies, compassion should be sufficient motivation to support a multilateral response. But global action is also a matter of self-interest. As long as the pandemic is still raging anywhere, it will pose a threat – both epidemiological and economic – everywhere.

The impact of COVID-19 on developing and emerging economies has only begun to reveal itself. There are good reasons to believe that these countries will ravaged far more by the pandemic than the advanced economies have been. After all, people in lower-income countries tend to live in closer proximity to one another. A higher share of the population suffers from pre-existing health problems that render them more vulnerable to the disease. And these countries' health systems are even less prepared to manage an epidemic than those of the advanced economies (which have hardly functioned smoothly).

A March 30 report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development offers an early glimpse of what lies in store for emerging and developing economies. The most successful of them rely on export-led growth, which will now collapse as the global economy contracts. Not surprisingly, global investment flows are also plummeting, as are commodity prices, indicating a tough road ahead for natural-resource exporters.

These developments are already being reflected in the yield spreads on developing countries' sovereign debt. Many governments will find it exceedingly difficult to roll over the debts coming due this year on reasonable terms, if at all.

Moreover, developing countries have fewer and harder choices about how to confront the pandemic. When people are living hand to mouth in the absence of adequate social protections, a loss of income could mean starvation. Yet these countries cannot replicate the US response, which features (so far) a $2 trillion economic package that will blow up the fiscal deficit by some 10% of GDP (on top of a pre-pandemic deficit of 5%).

Following a virtual emergency summit on March 26, G20 leaders issued a communiqué committing "to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social damage from the pandemic, restore global growth, maintain market stability, and strengthen resilience." To that end, at least two things can be done about the dire state of affairs in emerging and developing economies.

First, full use must be made of the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Rights, a form of "global money" that the institution was authorized to create at its founding. The SDR is an essential ingredient in the international monetary order that John Maynard Keynes advocated during the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944. The idea is that, because all countries will obviously want to protect their own citizens and economies during crises, the international community should have a tool for assisting the neediest countries without requiring national budgets to take a hit.

A standard SDR issuance – with some 40% of the SDRs going to developing and emerging economies – would make an enormous difference. But it would be even better if advanced economies like the United States donated or lent (on concessionary terms) their SDRs to a trust fund dedicated to helping poorer countries. One might expect that the countries providing this assistance will attach conditions, in particular, that the money not go to bailing out creditors.

It's also crucial that creditor countries help by announcing a stay on developing and emerging economies' debt service. To understand why this is so important, consider the US economy. Last month, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development announced that there would be no foreclosures on federally insured mortgages for 60 days. In essence, this policy is part of a broader "stay" on the entire US economy as a response to the COVID-19 crisis. Workers are staying home, restaurants are staying closed, and airlines are all but shut down. Why should creditors be allowed to continue racking up returns, especially when the interest rates they charge should have already created a sufficient risk cushion? Unless creditors grant such a stay, many debtors will emerge from the crisis owing more than they can possibly repay.

Such stays are just as important internationally as they are domestically. Under current conditions, many countries simply cannot service their debts, which, in the absence of a global stay on repayment, could lead to massive, rolling defaults. In many developing and emerging economies, the government's only choice is either to funnel more income to foreign creditors or allow more of its citizens to die. Obviously, the latter will be unacceptable to most countries, so the real choice for the international community, then, is between an orderly or a disorderly stay, with the latter scenario inevitably resulting in severe turbulence and far-reaching costs to the global economy.

Of course, it would be even better if we had an institutionalized mechanism for restructuring sovereign debt. The international community tried to achieve that in 2015, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of shared principles with overwhelming support. Unfortunately, that framework lacked the necessary buy-in from key creditor countries. It is probably too late to establish such a system now for use in the current crisis. But there will inevitably be more crises down the line, which means that sovereign-debt restructuring should be high on the agenda for the post-pandemic reckoning.

In John Donne's immortal words, "No man is an island …" Nor is any country – as the COVID-19 crisis has made abundantly clear. If only the international community would get its head out of the sand.

*Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is a University Professor at Columbia University and Chief Economist at the Roosevelt Institute. A paperback version of his most recent book, People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent, will be published by W.W. Norton in the US and by Penguin/Allen Lane in the UK.*

## Interview with Prof. Dr. Jan Pronk

*On the 7th of September the TEIMUN Secretariat 2019-2020, Inés Faghihi (IF) and Jochem Lammersma (JL), engaged in a conversation with Jan Pronk (JP). This conversation was written down by Jan Sedláček, Vice-President of the TEIMUN Foundation 2020-2021.*

**IF**: **Thank you very much for taking the time to have this interview with us Mr. Pronk. How have you been during the Covid-19 crisis so far?**

**JP**: Fine, however I am a bit older than you so I fall in the category of vulnerable people, now 80 years old. However, I had a very severe heart attack recently which makes it more difficult to participate in meetings. I have been staying at home mostly, which is not a problem because I live in a big house. After my heart attack I stopped giving courses, although I used to teach at a number of universities in the Netherlands and abroad. I have been concentrating on writing books and published two recently. I also like to walk around and since I live near the coast I can often go to the beach.

**IF: How does this crisis relate to some of the crises you have experienced yourself in your working life, perhaps in your time as a minister or UN envoy?**

**JP**: Nothing personally. But of course, this specific pandemic is not the first pandemic; there have been a number in the past. However, due to globalization this new pandemic is spreading around much faster than in the past; due to economic globalization, trade, travel, foreign investment, tourism, etc. So it's all of a sudden a real-world pandemic. This one is therefore very serious, it is a real world-system crisis. I am convinced there will be serious pandemics in the near future as well. Although I am no expert in virology, I know a lot about globalization and international development. World systems crises tend to have some specific causes but a great number of consequences. The world financial crisis of 2008 was an example and more are coming. There is also the refugee crisis which is huge and the number of refugees is increasing. There is also the accelerating climate crisis, and all are related to each other. This pandemic is just one other manifestation of an ongoing, extremely serious world systems crisis.

**JL: As you said, the ongoing globalization makes this a world systems crisis; do you think that our governance structures and international institutions have adapted properly to respond to this crisis?**

**JP**: On the contrary, they did not adapt and instead, they are being torn down. This is not the first time in history that the international community is facing a crisis. I always try to make connections to the 40s and beyond and related phenomena, such as the ongoing legacies of colonization. At that time, my grandparents' generations took the decision to build institutions to allow the world community to talk about crises and consult one another to discuss a common way to address these crises. The UN was a very important organization in this, including its daughter organizations and the European Community. International law was really international for the first time, with global institutions. It worked for a number of decades; of course it was not ideal but there were successes, such as decolonization, fostering economic development of newly independent states, further development of global values with regards to human rights, etc. There were of course also failures. In particular, when the P5 does not want the world community institutionalized to tackle specific issues and stalemates. The international monetary situation could have been handled much better for example. Anyway, it was always possible to talk, negotiate, consult. I've been in all these negotiations and consultations for decades and felt we were not doing well enough. Still, there was some progress. You can say that since 2001-2002 we are not making progress, not stalemating, but rather stepping backwards. It started more or less with the US decision to invade Iraq against the majority of SC opinion, it was followed by a retreat from several IOs and gradually, the IOs have been side-stepped altogether. As far as climate is concerned the Paris agreement is no agreement but rather an expression of good will. The signs are in the wrong direction, that's very bad, but the fact that we are not talking about solutions is even worse.

**IF: Did the UN play its parts to stop the pandemic from breaking out?**

JP: Answering the questions presupposes a definition of what the UN is. The UN is a set of values, which have been employed in international law, with a set of instruments to enforce them. But it is no world government of a federal character; it is the countries who must sit in the framework and if they do not, they penalize the very system they create. You have to use the system in order to address the crisis and countries do not want to use this system. It is not only the US, also Russia and China, which starts a domino effect of countries stepping back. Insofar as the UN is failing, and it is failing, it is not the SG or the organization itself, but the states which do not want to talk, let alone negotiate.

**IF: Coming back to globalization, I've been a business student myself learning a lot about the advantages of globalization, but we also saw that due to the interconnection of the world pandemics like these spread incredibly fast. Do you think that there might be a step away from globalization because it was seen how quickly a virus can spread?**

**JP**: I don't have a final answer to this and I am always a bit hesitant to express expectations about how things will go. I am a planner. My basic background is economic planning, I was a student of short and long-term economic planning with the Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen. I do not know what the process will be, but I have views about the direction the process ought to go. I expect that globalization will stick with us, because it is finally both a technological and economic phenomenon due to the intermingling of trade, finances and tech. We will not go back to national economies and isolationism in general. Also communication will remain global. I would, however, say that it is necessary to save globalization by stepping backwards. Globalization has become perverse, for instance in terms of international trade. We are getting all raw materials from all over the world, we transport them all over the world to bring them to a specific state for a specific stage of the production process, and then they are transported again all around the world. This is economically inefficient and devastating for the climate, the ecological balance and we will have to stop that. It is therefore important we make decisions at a stage of the production process where a product can be traded in the region. Not everything should be transported around the world. Another example – we will have to continue to produce economically, but who is going to decide the priorities? Production is for the welfare of people, and welfare does not mean, as is being told by the big companies, material welfare. It is also health; it is also culture. They also cost money, but priorities being set by financial institutions in the world are driving the very essential elements of welfare out of the market, such as care. And thirdly, inequality has increased, it is globalization for some and backwardness for many others. One third of the global population is extremely poor with life expectancies shorter than the world middle class, with limited possibilities to participate in education. See indigenous groups all around the world and for example, girls in Africa. Many are denied participation in world economic welfare. These three issues are very important to solve to save globalization. We have to set welfare priorities according to the real interests of all people.

**JL: You told us what you believe is needed, do you think that as somebody associated with, but still critical of the political left, that the political left is doing enough to accommodate these changes?**

**JP**: No. The political left has become nationalistic and adapted itself to the center-right. See for example refugees. The number is now 70-80 million. I suppose it will go over 100 million very soon. These people are in desperate circumstances. I see no leftist political organization that would really care for the fate of refugees. It is a shame how my former party – I stepped out of it for this particular reason – denies that there are millions of refugees trying to get to Europe and claiming that the problem was solved. The managerial problem was solved, but people are now being pushed back to countries in disarray, war, under dictatorship. Maybe for me this is a crucial example of the failure of the left to live up to values, traditional ideologies. I do not think it is necessary to develop new values, but to go back to the (expanded) values of the 1945 UN system and really implement them rather than build something new. Leftist political parties have neither taken the climate crisis seriously. They are constantly postponing, shifting the responsibility onto others, which is very bad for the next generations. What we have to do is carry out a policy to the benefit of the grandchildren of those in power today. You will have to measure possible consequences of your present decisions for people living in 2050-2060. The left is forgetting this, with some exceptions, but the traditional left in all European countries has failed.

**IF: Regarding the Covid-19 situation, what would you do differently if you were a minister today compared to what is being done by those in office today?**

**JP**: I do not want to be too critical of the way the corona crisis has been addressed in the Netherlands by the present government. However, three things. There is a major problem in capacity, which is the result of a decrease of public expenditure during the last fifteen years in healthcare.. There is a lot of criticism on the national public health institutes (GGD's), which have been curtailed for about fifteen years and now, they have to cope which is extremely difficult for them. It is thus extremely important to, first of all, restore the public sector financially and capacity-wise in many different fields. Second, you have to look across frontiers. You cannot solve it nationally as the government here in the Netherlands thinks. For example, by not following the advice of the WHO or trying to grab all the possible vaccines, not leaving many for other countries are just two examples. There should be a truly international policy. Thirdly, it is extremely important that the government is aware of the fact that the consequences of the present pandemic for poorer people are much bigger than for people who can afford to adapt. For instance, children of parents who do not have a strong economic position, or parents who still belong to so-called minority groups in the country. Their chances to participate in education have decreased in the past six months. That would be an approach which I would advocate.

**JL: I have a question with a bit of a different twist. I used to be a History student in my Bachelor's. One thing all Dutch history students learn about is the New Left movement of the sixties, which I see as an idealistic movement of young people that inspired the Dutch labour party. You of course played a prominent part in that movement. Although we certainly aren't a political organization; we are a youth movement in a way. What role do**

**you think organizations such as TEIMUN can have in this pandemic, but also in the challenges you mentioned more generally?**

**JP**: Thank you; I sounded perhaps pessimistic so far. Based on my experience as a university professor, both in the Netherlands and abroad, there is a great potential within the younger generation. The attitude of people in their 20s is very different than 20 or 30 years ago. At the time, the interest was your own purses and careers. I now see many more students who pursue their purse and their career no longer as the number one priority; they are interested in the world and other people and they would be willing to sacrifice a part of their own income and their own career possibilities to be a good world citizen. The young people, and now you see this even with children (see Greta), but also with regards to BLM, you see that young people take the lead. People in their 40s are in power, they have a lot to lose; their present career and present income. The younger generation has very little to lose at the present moment, but they are willing to move in a different direction than previous generations. I hope that career and purse is not going to be replaced by another important youth priority, and that is self-image. I have the impression that many young people are more interested in their self-image than their purse and career. This is dangerous, because you are stepping into a bubble and will lose contact with the people around you. You have to be able to see the world’s affairs from your neighbour’s perspective.

*Jan Pronk is a former Dutch minister and was the UN Special Representative for Sudan from 2004 to 2007. He is further a member of the TEIMUN Honorary Leadership Committee.*

## Corona pandemic: Six international trends

*By Kees van Rij*

"Pandemics change history" said Frank M. Snowden, Professor Emeritus of History & History of Medicine of Yale University and author of the book 'Epidemics and Society', at the beginning of March rightfully to The New Yorker. Pandemics played more than once a crucial role in the course of world history. In some cases with great consequences. Historically speaking, pandemics unchained conflicts, suppressed revolutions, weakened religions and empires, created scapegoats and altered societies forever. Needless to say, the coronavirus (COVID-19) will have far reaching consequences for international organizations and international relations and will not leave The Kingdom of the Netherlands and its core interests untouched. But what the exact nature and scope of the consequences of the coronavirus will be, is difficult to predict at the moment. It will depend on the duration of this crisis (including how long it will take to get a vaccine) and the course that will be chosen. Generally speaking, we can identify five major economic and political tendencies, chances and risks. The tendencies are enumerated in random order and the list is by no means exhaustive.

1. **Vulnerabilities in the pharmaceutical supply chain**

The COVID-19 crisis has shed a light on existing vulnerabilities in the global pharmaceutical supply chain. One of which is the Dutch and European dependency on Asia for strategic medical goods. Not only for essential corona devices such as surgical masks, test kits and breathing equipment, but also for a large quantity of medicines. The production of these medicines is now limited to individual producers in Asia. The faltering production of medicines in primarily China and India already led to temporary shortages in Europe before the corona crisis. Zooming in on the Netherlands, last year the number of times a medicine was out of stock for longer than two weeks almost doubled from 769 times in 2018 to a record of 1492 times in 2019. Europe will need to diminish this dependency to strengthen its position. An example of diminishing this dependency is the 2019 decision of the minister for Medical Care of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Bruno Bruins, in 2019 to start with the creation of a so called 'iron stock'. It is likely that after the acute crisis the creation of European stocks and the partial return of medical production capacity to Europe will be high on the European agenda.

2. **Human rights and democracy under pressure**

Never before have we witnessed countries all over the world declaring simultaneously a state of emergency and adopting measures, emergency laws, and regulations restricting the liberties of citizens. Many of which are fully justified. International law allows for restrictions of fundamental freedoms and human rights in times of great crises, as we are experiencing now with the corona pandemic. However, emergency measures must be proportional, temporary and strictly necessary at all times. It is also important that measures are merely targeted towards fighting the spread of the coronavirus. In some countries this is not the case. Many autocratic leaders seize this opportunity to strengthen their position of power. This is worrying. COVID-19 is used as an excuse by these leaders to sideline counter powers (opposition, parliament, media), sometimes with the help of new technology. And what do we do when these measures are not withdrawn after the acute crisis and become permanent?

### 3. Global economic crisis

An unparalleled global economic crisis has unfolded. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has labelled the current situation as "the worst recession since the great depression" and predicted in its semi-annual outlook that the world economy will shrink with 4,9 %. This will hit the Dutch export severely, attributing 34 % to the Dutch GDP and accounting for 32 % of total employment (i.e. 2,4 million jobs). According to the IMF, the Dutch economy will decline with 7,7 %. Studies suggest that extreme poverty in the world will increase significantly. In some regions poverty will relapse to the level it was in 1990.

### 4. Sustainable recovery policy

But the current crisis also offers opportunities, for example with regards to realizing the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. In the short run, the corona crisis has a positive effect on the climate: the emission of greenhouse gasses has decreased acutely. However, this effect is only temporary. In the coming period, when governments worldwide will invest billions of euros to boost the economy, we have to avoid that climate, nature, and the climate goals will get further out of sight. Precisely now we have to invest in sustainable technologies and practices. This would give us the opportunity to start with structural changes towards a sustainable and circular economy and to accelerate this process. In other words, we need to build back better.

### 5. Digital acceleration

A wide range of technological developments have accelerated dramatically because of the corona crisis. The digitalization, also related to international organizations and diplomacy, has gotten an enormous boost. Examples can be found in digital meetings (including multilateral negotiations), working from home and online webinars. Undoubtedly, part of this digitalization will remain in the post-corona era.

### 6. Consequences for international relations

If we have learned anything from this crisis, it is that we cannot take the world around us for granted, including the international agreements that we have concluded and the international organizations that we have created. We have a Dutch saying that perfectly illustrates the danger we encounter in times of grave crises: "*Onder druk wordt alles vloeibaar*". Literally meaning that everything becomes liquid under pressure, figuratively speaking it intends to express that in situations under pressure agreed upon norms become negotiable again. Whether we like it or not, the world as we knew it pre-corona is being renegotiated and remodeled. The five tendencies numbered above are examples of this remodeling. It is precisely the task of professionals working in the field of international relations, and in particular of diplomats, to seize this window of opportunity and to try to renegotiate what could benefit from alterations and to defend what needs to preserved. International organizations provide an excellent arena for this.

*Kees van Rij is a Dutch diplomat currently serving as the Dutch ambassador to Brazil. In the past he served as the Dutch ambassador to Turkey, Spain and Greece. He is especially concerned with European matters and held positions as Director European Integration and European correspondent in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

# CHAPTER III

# COVID-19 AS A GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGE

**And suddenly everything stopped – A comment on the Economic System and Governance**
by Paul Tang

**Gaining Public Trust During COVID-19 Requires Swift Action, Cohesive Measures, and Transparency**
by Jochelle Greaves Siew

**Testing Corona**
by Alewijn Ott

**Keep the focus on the big picture: humanity's herd immunity**
by Kathryn Sikkink

## And suddenly everything stopped – A comment on the Economic System and Governance

*By Paul Tang*

Suddenly everything stopped. Empty squares from Rome to New York, rows of grounded airplanes, offices gone quiet. This is the second big crisis in my political life. But while the 'Great Recession' left us dazed by all the complex derivative products and economic processes, the 'Great Lock-down' due to Covid-19 has made me, and many others, reflect on a better future. While the shock caused by the premature deaths of many of our loved ones is difficult to overcome, there is also the sense that the economic shutdown gives us the chance for a reset. A reset that allows us to bring back a better economy, fairer and more sustainable.

My thinking about a better future has mainly focussed on two urgent failures of our current economic system. I don't need to convince you of the massive challenge that is climate change. Without a coordinated and far-reaching response now, the earth I will leave my children will be unrecognizable, and much less inhabitable, than the one in which I was born. Telling however, is that much of our response to climate changed has so far followed our free market ideology in concentrating individual responsibility. We tell people not to fly, eat less meat or not to use plastic straws, and have been lacking on an effective and far reaching governmental response. Instead of solving our collective problems collectively, we offload them to the individual, placing an impossible-to-satisfy burden on our citizens. The logical consequence is guilt by some, and an aggressive resistance to moral demands by others. We have seen the same reflex in our thinking about the second crisis facing our societies: growing inequalities. While the 1% has seen their incomes increase significantly since the last crisis, there has been a squeeze in middle classes, with their size decreasing significantly in all but four EU member states. But again, the burden to address lower wages and unemployment are put on the individual: Unemployed? Try harder. Want better pay or a better job? Find the time for evening classes. But 'lifelong learning', no matter how good it sounds, is not made for everyone and those with two jobs and/or families will simply not have the time to study next to work.

The first obstacle to a necessary change has already been overcome. "The most terrifying words in the English language are 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help' ". This quote from president Reagan well reflects the fear of big government that from the '80s and '90s. But with only governments standing between us and a full-blown healthcare disaster and complete economic meltdown, the appreciation for a strong government is again taking hold. While following the oil crises in the 70s, the 'Chicago Boys', led by Friedman, stood ready to launch their free-market ideology, we now have progressive thinkers including Piketty, Mazzucato and Zucman to analyse the limitations of capitalism, and provide solutions to improve the lives of billions. Acceptance of a stronger government makes such solutions possible. I'd like to highlight three here.

Firstly, we need to rewrite the role of corporates in our society. Gone should be the days where the owners of companies can accumulate corporate profits while offloading costs on the environment and employees. Governments support corporates throughout the current crisis but should ask for something in return: a clear 'transition plan' in which companies outline how they will fit in a climate neutral economy, a stronger voice for employees in corporate decision making and living wages for all employees. Rewriting the 'social contract' we have with firms should be based first and foremost on a change in attitude amongst corporate decision makers. Firms should put their efforts on making high-quality products and delivering great services instead of maximizing profits for shareholders. However, legislative changes could facilitate this culture-change: higher costs for polluting the environment, remuneration of top-management based on a firm's long-term achievements instead of quarterly results, and changing rules on intellectual property rights which increasingly create monopolies that stifle innovation.

The second change is a more active role of governments in steering the development of our economies. In *The Entrepreneurial State* Mazzucato shows that governments have developed many of the innovations of the past decades: from Internet to GPS to flat screen TVs. We should put this power of governments to direct our economies to good use. Massive investments in R&D on the green transition are needed and state support to companies should be used to make them green. However, this is not sufficient. Governments should pick up work that otherwise is left undone. From home support to the elderly to supporting local community organisations, much work that is invaluable for communities is not performed because it simply doesn't create sufficient profits. With a 'job guarantee', governments can ensure these jobs are finally getting the attention they deserve, while ensure all citizens have work to give meaning to their lives.

The last step we need to take is to finally allocate the burdens of our social system in a fair way. After the previous crisis, the feeling took hold that bankers were able to keep their bonuses while the rest of us saw their tax bills go up. At the same time, austerity meant that the quality of public services went down. We should not repeat this mistake. Firstly we should increase corporate tax rates. Average corporate tax rates in Europe have decreased from 40% in 1990 to 19% now. Thanks to government approved tax avoidance schemes, many firms are able to decrease their tax bill even further. Shell has not paid any tax in the Netherlands recently, whereas Apple's tax bill in Ireland was a mere 0.05% of its profits. This benefits the owners of companies – its shareholders – who get big dividend payments, as well as top management who receive big bonuses. By creating a EU wide minimum tax rate, we can tax corporates without having to fear that this leads to companies shifting overseas. The size of our common market guarantees that companies will continue doing business in the EU. But we also need to ensure that the wealthiest citizens contribute to our economic recovery. They are able to do so. In the Netherlands, for example, the richest 1% owns 28% of our wealth. What is more, they can use this wealth to make more and more money without having to put in additional work. In his book "*Capital in the 21st century*" Thomas Piketty describes how this can quickly spiral out of control. Only with higher wealth taxes can we rebalance the distribution of wealth between the wealthiest and our middle classes and restore the equilibrium upon which our post-World War Two economy was based.

These three avenues are a start to a fairer and more sustainable economy. As always, the only force to guarantee change is the electorate. Public pressure on politicians as well as participation in the political process are the most effective ways to enact change. So vote, protest and join a political party. But also take the time to, when stuck at home in a locked-down country, reflect on the chances this reset offers and define your ideal post corona society. And then come into action to turn your ideal into reality.

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## Gaining Public Trust During COVID-19 Requires Swift Action, Cohesive Measures, and Transparency

*By Jochelle Greaves Siew*

How does a government maintain public trust during a global pandemic that has infected millions and claimed over 500,000 lives globally? Well, to begin with, it should ensure that all government officials follow any official government advice given to the public. Yet, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, was unable to do so with his Chief Adviser, Dominic Cummings. Similarly, both the political and scientific communities should co-ordinate and offer the same information and guidance to the general public. Still, US President Donald Trump seems to be incapable of agreeing with health-care professionals and scientific evidence.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there seemed to be a rally around the flag effect in which there were spikes in State leaders' approval ratings and public trust levels. However, this did not last long. For instance, both the UK and US governments are now experiencing lowered levels of public trust. On the other hand, some governments, such as in New Zealand and China, offer great lessons to world leaders on how to maintain or gain public trust during this crisis.

In this piece, I explain how variation in government responses can affect public trust and support for incumbent governments during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to examine this relationship between government action and public trust since the success or failure of government measures to combat the pandemic relies heavily on public trust. In times of crises, people turn to their governments for leadership and hope. Depending on the exact actions and policies of governments and respective public opinion, public trust levels vary. Accordingly, those who trust their governments are more likely to follow the rules and guidelines implemented during lockdown.

### The Timeliness of Government Action

Governments that have been successful in gaining and maintaining public trust and support during the pandemic were those that took appropriate early action. The UK and US, for instance, are two countries in the Global North that are rightly criticised for their initial idleness in acting. In a recent survey[i], 81% of respondents in the UK and 74% in the US mentioned that their governments should have acted faster in the fight against the spread of COVID-19. On the other hand, in Italy, where public trust is much higher despite suffering a high number of deaths, only 57% raised this issue. Both the UK and US could and should have acted more proactively – for instance, enforcing travel restrictions both internally and internationally or quarantine measures for travellers much earlier.

In the Global South, China and Trinidad and Tobago are great examples of timely government action. The Chinese government's immediate response to combat the spread of COVID-19 laid the foundation for effectively preventing its domestic spread. More than 80% of the public in China stated that they trust their government's measures.[ii] Similarly, Trinidad and Tobago's government closed its borders to international travellers on March 22nd with just a day's notice. As an island, it was a strategic, swift move that allowed for imported cases to be kept to a minimum, even lending to the fact that the twin-island nation boasts only 126 confirmed cases at the time of writing.

Of course, there is always the chance of a government taking action too pre-emptively, as India did. On March 25th, India entered into a lockdown with less than a full day's notice. There were 500 reported cases in the country. Now, when the country needs the strictness of the lockdown measures that were instituted in March, there are none. Restaurants and offices are open, and reported cases are increasing every single day. The Indian government made the mistake of adopting similar policy responses to other countries without considering the number of cases in India or its current migrant crisis. After entering into a lockdown prematurely, the country had no choice but to re-open due to the state of the economy and its inability to continue as it was, as well as the failure to handle the migrant crisis.

**The Nature of Government Measures**

Another feature of countries with high public trust is the strict and cohesive nature of their policies. Governments that enact stringent and consistent measures are rewarded with greater public trust and support. What politicians need to understand is that citizens are aware of why strict social confinement and lockdowns are necessary. For example, in a recent survey, 7 out of 10 people in the UK believe that more isolation is preferable.[iii] Citizens appreciate having their fears considered and prioritised over economic interests by their governments.

The extent to which the US, for instance, values individual freedoms has harmed levels of public trust. Stricter measures should have been put in place throughout the country, rather than it being left to individual state governments. As expected, partisan divides remain, with right-wing supporters desiring a faster re-opening of the economy. However, the trend is that the general public does not trust the federal government's measures to combat COVID-19, and instead put their trust in their state and local government. In a survey, only 17% of respondents in the US wanted the economy to be re-opened.[iv]

On the other hand, if we take a look at Trinidad and Tobago, it serves as a leading example of the nature of measures needed to foster public trust and support. The government took swift and strict action once the threat of COVID-19 was determined, including implementing measures that prevent citizens and residents such as myself from returning to the island. As stricter measures were put in place, the incumbent government received an outpouring of support from the public. What makes this even more significant is the understanding of the political context in the island – several divisions along the lines of class and race often dominate political views and support for political parties. In this situation, however, these dividing lines were blurred as the country came together to prevent the local spread of the virus. As a citizen, it was very interesting for me to observe this phenomenon. I also note that a large degree of this support stems from trust in scientific advisors and the Chief Medical Officer, whom the government smartly kept at the forefront of communications with the public, particularly during regular briefings on the COVID-19 situation in the country.

As already mentioned, it is possible for States to take extreme measures at a time they are not yet required. India, once again, should have adopted a less strict policy concerning its lockdown, particularly in the beginning. The extent of the lockdown left families separated and rural workers stranded.[v] In addition, the government could and should have allowed for grain reserves to be utilised. Given that there was no labour and interstate movement allowed, the supply of all grains were affected. No one was able to harvest the grains, and even if harvest was possible, there was no channel for distribution. At the time of writing, India is in dire need of strict social distancing rules to be put in place once again, especially regarding the capital, New Delhi. It serves as a lesson for States to take more cautious approaches to economic reopening and time both lockdowns and reopening with more foresight.

As governments decide how to handle the upcoming phases of the pandemic, they must keep in mind that citizens want priority to be given to health issues over economic concerns. Additionally, they should be concerned with limiting freedoms with strict measures, such as lockdowns or quarantine requirements. Indeed, they must also be prepared to answer difficult questions concerning their failure to take action sooner.

**Transparency of Government Action**

Undoubtedly, the sharing of information between a government and its public is fundamental to the level of public trust in a State. That trust, or its lack thereof, informs the responses of both individual members of the public and governments to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite this obvious significance, many governments have failed to be transparent with its citizens and residents.

For instance, the UK government has been criticised for changing policies often, leaving the public confused about which rules still applied after changes had been made. Living in London, I can attest to this, having been inundated with questions from friends over what the government message's shift from the 'stay at home' to 'stay alert' message meant or what the precise social distancing measures are exactly. Similarly, in the US, the public receives opposing guidance from both President Trump and health-care professionals and advisers. Messaging has been inconsistent, with President Trump offering little reassurance or guidance to the people, stating that the COVID-19 outbreak "may get a little bigger, it may not get bigger at all" and giving advice in public briefings that is in direct opposition to the warnings of health officials, including whether the injection of disinfectants is a possible COVID-19 remedy.

This is in direct contrast to another Global North State, New Zealand, which has demonstrated the conditions of a strong and cohesive national response, with a leader who communicated clearly and effectively to her people. Looking at New Zealand and States which share similar positions regarding transparency, such as South Korea, we can see that citizens are more likely to trust their politicians who are direct and transparent. This in turn makes them more likely to comply with lockdown and health guidelines.

Moreover, the UK, the government has faced backlash over their (mis)handling of the Dominic Cummings scandal. The decline in public trust and support of Johnson's government can largely be explained by the Dominic Cummings scandal, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson's chief adviser was accused of breaking lockdown rules by travelling to Durham and later Castle Barnard "for a short drive" to test his eyesight,[vi] without any sense of accountability or responsibility to the people. This episode reminds us that politicians need to hold their own to account, having consequences for those that break rules or disregard advice in the same manner as would happen for everyday citizens. The State cannot reasonably expect the public to act in line with their guidance if officials fail to do so.

This issue of transparency can also be found in States that have otherwise had a good track record in gaining public support in their fight against the virus. As a Trinidadian citizen stuck in the UK without any word from the government on repatriation policies or conditions, I can personally understand why citizens would lose trust in their governments when their concerns receive no straightforward answer. To instil trust in a government often presupposes knowledge of their policies and actions. Instead, I sit almost every day at my laptop listening to public health briefings, hoping for some word on repatriation. In addition, the government took charge of reporting the number of cases and deaths. It claims the reason for borders remaining shut to even nationals after more than 3 months is that all cases have been imported and there is no community transmission. Yet, community testing was only actually implemented on July 1st, 2020.[vii] This was nothing more than an evident attempt to control figures and keep fear in the mind of the public, almost demonizing nationals abroad like myself who are willing to be State quarantined if it means we can return to our homes and families. Another issue that the government has not been entirely transparent about is the number of Venezuelan refugees that have illegally entered the country while borders are closed, where they end up and whether they are being subject to State-quarantine if allowed to stay, as many have been.

China, however, is a unique case in this regard. While the government certainly attempted to silence the noise surrounding COVID-19, initially allowing the virus to spread in Wuhan, the regime has nonetheless effectively countered the pandemic. There is an evident lack of transparency or freedom of information as a whole on the part of the government. The concept of trust is also not the same as it is in the other countries that I have discussed. There is not much room for dissent, nor is there the same political pressure for transparency. However, the public is aware that their access to information is tightly controlled and many do not seem to care. One reason for this is that the Chinese are accustomed to trading control for security and their interests being protected. There is widespread acceptance of this sort of social contract, a contract which has worked thus far in this particular circumstance.

What State leaders can learn from these examples is that sharing the latest information with and getting feedback from the public are invaluable. Governments must recognize that public trust can only be maintained through full transparency and certainty. This in turn results in high levels of civic awareness and voluntary cooperation that strengthens any collective effort to combat the spread of the virus.

**So, Now What?**

The success or failure of a government response to the pandemic depends on changing public behaviour and opinion by gaining public trust and getting the public to follow government advice. Governments must not leave the public in the dark regarding their actions and reasoning for policies if they expect the public to follow official guidance. For citizens to take threats and crises seriously, they require government transparency and certainty in scientific data.

Further, as governments decide how to handle the upcoming phases of the pandemic, they must keep in mind that citizens often want priority to be given to health issues over economic concerns, thereby understanding the need for and preferring strict measures. Policies and measures must reflect this and be implemented consistently and without hesitation to avoid public confusion and distrust. They must also be prepared to answer difficult questions concerning their failure to take action sooner.

If States fail to heed these lessons, the shadow of the pandemic will be long and costly for our democracies.

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## Testing Corona

*By Alewijn Ott*

On Saturday 9 May 2020, two newspapers in the North of the Netherlands, Dagblad van het Noorden and the Leeuwarder Courant, published an article about testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19: “Much less testing is being done in the North than could be” (DvhN) and “Much less testing was carried out in Friesland than in other regions” (LC).

These are no reassuring headlines. We seem to be doing bad in the North. But are those concerns justified? In those days, the epidemic was clearly on its way back and nationwide daily only 15 to 25 people were admitted to hospital with Covid-19. The weekly RIVM report of May 7, two days earlier, was more positive than the newspapers: the three Northern provinces, Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe had the fewest Covid-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 inhabitants during the corona epidemic and this region of the Netherlands was the only region without increased mortality.

Despite all virologists and other experts in the media, many oversimplified statements have been made about corona testing in recent months. With this article I want to discuss the pros and cons, the strengths and weaknesses of corona tests. There is not one Corona Test, as many people think, but there are already hundreds of different tests. Some come from the diagnostic industry, others are developed by local laboratories themselves. The latter is comparable to how pharmacists also make certain medicines themselves. But there is a striking difference between the pharmaceutical industry and the diagnostics industry. Almost all medicines on our market are of a reasonably good to very good quality. And that is certainly not the case with Covid-19 tests. The quality varies from downright bad to very good, just as the prices vary from cheap to expensive.

**Quality**

What about the quality? For this, the sensitivity, specificity and the associated positive predictive value (PPV) are important. With a good test, both sensitivity and specificity score high. A highly sensitive Covid-19 test is positive in most people carrying the virus. So such a sensitive test misses very few positives: In other words, such test has very few false negatives. Tests with a poor sensitivity provide false negatives in a considerable number of the samples that do contain the virus.

Specificity is a measure of how the test performs in people who do not carry the virus. In the optimal case, the test scores negative in all these persons, and then the specificity of the test is 100%. Suppose that in 1000 negative persons 10 still test positive in the test, than the specificity is 99% (10/1000).

The positive predictive value (PPV) is the percentage of all positive tests for which the result is actually correct. A test with many false positive results has a low PPV and therefore a limited specificity. When tested with a PPV of 100%, every positive result is correct: the virus is actually in the material. A test with less good PPV can also be false positive. In that case, the patient could wrongly receive a Covid-19 diagnosis, with all ensuing consequences.

The best Covid-19 tests therefore have both very good sensitivity and specificity. In bad tests, one or both is missing.

The good news for the Netherlands is that Dutch laboratory diagnostics is known for being of very good quality. For Covid-19 diagnostics the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (the RIVM) and the regular medical microbiological laboratories have opted to use only the best quality tests. In addition to regular laboratories, there are also commercial and alternative laboratories. The quality of commercial tests varies, usually depending on the price. Alternative laboratories are only acceptable to alternative "healers", also known as quacks.

At the height of the Dutch Covid-19 outbreak, in mid-March 2020, there was only limited test capacity. At that time, the tests were mainly conducted on patients who were admitted to the hospital and, where possible, hospital employees with complaints of infection. During the first month of the outbreak, in the heat of the battle against the virus, nursing homes and general practitioners were left unattended. As a result, many older patients with complaints and primary care workers were not tested. But since then, fortunately, the test capacity has gradually increased and from the 1$^{st}$ of June everyone with complaints can be tested.

Especially when the number of new infections is very low, the specificity of the test must be very good, preferably close to 100%. The reason is the following: Suppose a test has a specificity of 99%. This means that 1 in 100 tests of negative people is false positive. If only 0.1% of the population is really positive, this test finds 1 real positive and 10 false positive in 1000 tested people. Then the PPV is 9% (1/11) and 91% is false positive. Such a mediocre 'test performance' would not be acceptable in the Netherlands.

**PCR (polymerase chain reaction)**

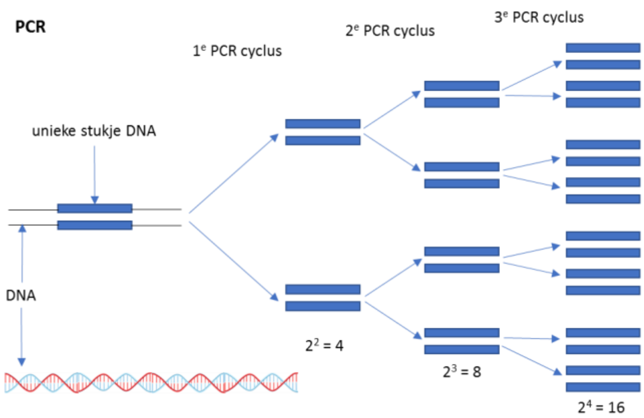
There are two types of tests for Covid-19. The first type detects the virus itself, the second type measures antibodies against the virus in the blood.

The first type of test is mainly done with PCR, a technique explained below. But viral proteins can also detected with an 'antigen' test, also referred to as a 'rapid test' or 'point of care test' (POCT). This rapid test is comparable to the pregnancy test which is available in the pharmacy. The advantage of these antigen tests is that they are relatively cheap and literally fast, with results within 15 minutes. The disadvantage is that they have a rather poor sensitivity and sometimes poor specificity. The former is annoying if you think you are not contagious based on a negative rapid test, when in reality you are. The second is annoying if you hoped to be able to travel with a negative test, but the test unexpectedly turns out false positive.

In PCR, a piece of DNA or RNA is multiplied with smart biochemical techniques, to such an amount that it can be measured. In the case of Covid-19, it is RNA that needs to be multiplied. For the Dutch Covid-19 PCR test, two RNA fragments from the genetic material of the virus were selected to recognize SARS-CoV-2 in a body fluid, namely a piece that is completely unique for this virus (from the RdRP gene) and a piece that was also present in the coronavirus that caused the first SARS outbreak in 2002 and 2003 (part of the E-gene).

This is how a PCR works: If a sample contains SARS-CoV-2, the unique pieces of RNA in the virus are recognized by specially synthesized molecules. Then a 'polymerase' enzyme copies these pieces, doubling the number in the sample. This biochemical reaction requires a cycle of temperature changes. The unique piece doubles with each additional cycle (figure 1). The PCR also contains molecules that bind specifically to these multiplied pieces. Binding of these molecules produces fluorescence that can be measured by a detector. The more pieces created, the more fluorescence. If, for example, a sample of a throat-nose swab contains SARS-CoV-2, the fluorescence will at a certain moment exceed a threshold value and then the test becomes positive. Sometimes, with a strong positive sample, this is already the case after 12 cycles. Sometimes with a weakly positive sample it is only after 38 cycles. Because the amount doubles per cycle, there are almost 70 million times more virus particles in a sample of 12 cycles than in a sample of 38 cycles, namely 2 to the $26^{th}$ (38 minus 12) power. If a sample is positive, we call the number of cycles it took the Ct value. Thus, the samples in the above examples were positive with Ct12 and Ct38.

**Figure 1: Schematic display of the first 3 PCR cycles**




A PCR test is extremely sensitive. It can detect even the smallest amount. That is why PCR can be used to test whether there is SARS-CoV-2 in sewage water, and if so, how much. But the PCR also has its pitfalls, such as the types and purity of reagents, equipment used and even the materials from which the swab, collection tube and storage solution are made. The first Covid-19 test developed by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) in America used a reagent that caused results to be false positive in some laboratories. It took the CDC some time to find out. The PCR test is also sensitive to disturbances. In some patients, the saliva or nasal mucus appears to contain a substance that inhibits the complex PCR reaction. Therefore, we test every sample for possible inhibition. If a laboratory decides not to check for inhibition, this saves them a lot of extra work and hassle. But then they no longer know when the PCR is false negative due to inhibition. Thus, such a sample can incorrectly be assumed negative. In inhibited samples, the PCR can usually work out successful if the sample is diluted ten times. Then the result is slightly weaker positive, but the concentration of inhibiting substances is also lower and not troubling the PCR any more.

Although the Ct value provides a lot of information about the amount of virus in a sample, unfortunately little is done with it. That is a pity, because someone with a Ct12 positive test has a lot more virus in his/her nose-throat mucus than someone with Ct38. The last person is infected with the virus, but probably not contagious, whereas the first person can be very contagious because his/her cough or sneeze droplets contain a lot of virus. There is no one-to-one relationship between infectivity and Ct value. The amount of virus in a sample also depends on the quality of sample collection. And to the stage of infection. The viral load is lower at very early or late stage of infection than at the peak of infectivity. After going through an infection, a trace of the virus may still be detectable for weeks in some people. Other people seem to get rid of all viral RNA very quickly from their mucous membranes. Sometimes the virus is no longer detectable in a nose-throat mucus sample, but still in sputum that is coughed up from deep in the lungs.

For most patients and medical practitioners it is annoying if the test has a poor sensitivity and may thus be false negative. Because even a weakly positive test (with high Ct value) can provide an explanation for the complaints of the patient. But at a population level, it does not matter if weakly positive people are missed, because these people are probably not contagious.

The PCR usually is a very sensitive and reliable test. In most laboratories PCRs are performed on 48, 96 or even 384 test tubes simultaneously. These PCRs are complex: they require equipment, complicated reagents, and a lot of knowledge and experience. Everything can go wrong if carried out less carefully. In addition to these mass-tests, there are also tests available that can perform a PCR on one sample, in a cassette or 'cartridge' that fits in a machine specially designed for this cassette. In this 'single patient' test, the sample has to be pipetted into the cartridge, after which the machine performs the PCR and interprets the result. With these commercially available assays, PCR becomes relatively easy to perform. This PCR no longer depends on a molecular lab and on molecularly trained analysts. And the quality of this test is just as good as the mass-test. Another advantage is that the cartridge test can be used at any time: 'random access', and not like the mass-tests only at a few times a day. But there are also drawbacks. The cartridge machine must be purchased and maintained. And for each test this PCR produces more waste (from all cartridges). In addition, the random access test is more expensive than the mass-test.

New tests are being developed. Every now and then we are surprised by yet another test with beautiful promises and trendy names. Like a few weeks ago when the British Nanopore Nudge rapid Covid-19 test even made it in the Dutch 8 PM TV news broadcast. The unsuspecting news viewer got the impression that this clever English invention will soon reliably test Covid-19 within 1.5 hours. But it probably comes with a hefty price tag. And the Nudgebox machine can only test 1 sample at a time. Moreover, nothing is yet known about the sensitivity and specificity of this test. In short: a spectacular news item, but for the time being not a game-changer.

**When to test?**

The best known complaints of Covid-19 are fever and a dry cough. And then there are fatigue, sore throat, headache, muscle pain, shortness of breath and a runny nose. Some people with complaints feel quite unwell. But others only notice that they are infected through a loss of smell and taste. There are persons who do not notice any complaints at all. Even half of all people with a SARS-CoV-2 infection may be asymptomatic. This makes it difficult to trace all infected persons.

It is very clear that people can transmit the virus to others one to two days before they develop symptoms. That is exactly the reason for the advice to maintain a distance of 1.5 meters and good hand hygiene, even in situations where no one has complaints!

Because people can be contagious without complaints or before they develop complaints, it is suggested to test everyone. For example, the Dutch football association, KNVB, decided that professional footballers should be tested weekly. That is not feasible for the whole country though and it is not wise either. Testing all travelers at our main airport Schiphol returning from 'orange' or 'red' countries on the RIVM corona risk map is not practical either. Testing large groups of people without complaints takes a lot of effort, resources and testing capacity. Including all expenses, each corona PCR test ends up on about a € 100. With such costs, testing must make sense. Nobody doubts that testing of people with complaints is useful. And it turns out to be useful to test roommates of people carrying the virus, even if they have no complaints. That is because the likelihood that these close contacts also carry the virus carriers is relatively high. In fact, they may even be the source of the infection.

Travelers arriving at Schiphol from orange or red countries run an above-average risk. They ran that risk at their holiday destination, at the airport or on the plane. But without complaints, the chance of finding the virus at them on their arrival at Schiphol is very small. If they became infected at the airport or on the plane it still takes a few days before the virus can be detected. The incubation period varies from 2 to 12 days, usually 5 to 6 days. A negative test at Schiphol does not prove that someone is not infected. The same applies to all situations in which large groups of people without complaints are tested. The test is a snapshot, a negative test is no guarantee against infections in the following days.

According to the World Health Organization, a positive percentage of more than 10% means that testing is done too little. A rich country like the Netherlands cannot afford to settle for 10%. When we find 10%, we test too little. But if the positive percentage becomes very low, we have to ask ourselves whether we are spending our resources sensibly. We must not deplete our resources too quickly because we are not rid of SARS-CoV-2 for the time being. We will need our resources over a long period of time. Policymakers easily argue that ever more testing needs to be done, but our laboratories have no overcapacity. In addition to equipment we need more qualified molecular analysts. For the time being diagnostics are running with the same employees as we had before the corona epidemic. The national costs of diagnostics (some € 2 million per day) should not worry us, but let's test sensibly. And not like the Municipal health service (GGD) noted in mid-August: “Too many people report for a test who in fact do not need one”.

There is an alternative to the relatively expensive PCR. That is the aforementioned ‘rapid test’ (pregnancy test type). This test is not suitable if certainty is required, because the quality is insufficient. But it can be used for large groups of asymptomatic persons with low a priori chance of a positive result. We will have to examine which of all tests ‘on the market’ performs best for a reasonable price. In case of a low a priori probability, the test requires very high specificity. No rapid test is as sensitive as a PCR. Weak positive samples will be missed. But this is offset by a much lower price per test. With a low a priori chance of the virus, only few tests will be positive. At the same time only few positives will be missed. And we don't fear weakly positive people without complaints (no cough nor sneeze).

**Serology**

The second type of test does not measure the virus but antibodies against it. This test is called a serology test because it requires serum from the patient. Serum is the portion of blood that is left over when you take out all cells and clotting proteins.

In most people, their bodies’ defense against infections produces specific antibodies, immunoglobulins, such as IgG and IgM. This also applies to people infected with SARS-CoV-2. In fact, the defense against infection consists of two parts: ‘humoral’ defense, which works by means of antibodies, and cellular defense, by which white blood cells clear the virus. Only the humoral part, the antibodies, are easily measurable.

From about 10 to 14 days after a SARS-CoV-2 infection, antibodies against the virus can be measured in the blood of most people. But there is quite a difference in the amount of specific antibodies between different people. People who had a serious infection often have more antibodies in their blood than people with mild or asymptomatic infection.

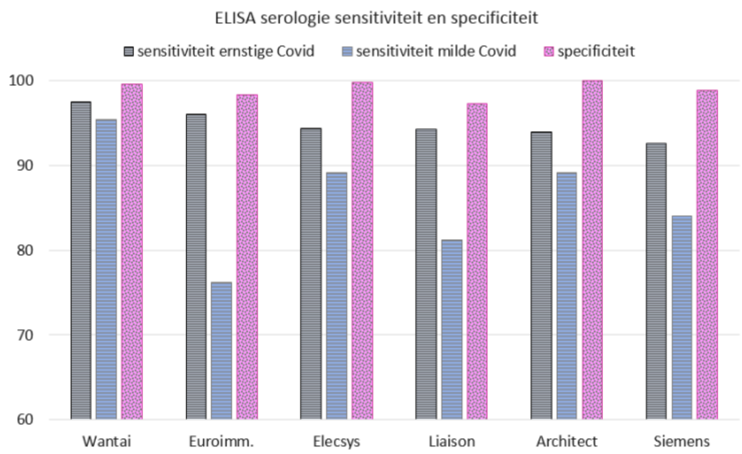
A large number tests are available for serology. Again, not all Covid-19 serology tests are very reliable. There are two types of serological tests: the first consists of rapid tests (pregnancy test type), and the second consists of so-called ELISA and ELISA-based automated tests. ELISA stands for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay. This second category of testing is more reliable than the first.

Several laboratories have assessed several promising serology tests together with the RIVM. The report of this study is publicly available, and updates are regularly released.[1] Research into the quality of various tests was conducted by drawing blood from people with proven Covid-19 and verifying in the serum whether the tests were positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. Serum from persons with proven Covid-19 was used to determine the sensitivity of the tests.

In addition, the same tests were done in people who certainly had no SARS-CoV-2 infection. These people cannot have Covid-19 antibodies in their blood and the serology should thus be negative. Serum from subjects who had no SARS-CoV-2 infection was used to determine the specificity of the tests. Serum from the same patients can be used in different tests. This way, tests can be easily compared.

Because ELISAs and comparable automated tests are more reliable, more research has been done into these tests. Figure 2 shows the results of sensitivity and specificity of six investigated tests. This figure only shows the sensitivity of the test to detect antibodies >14 days after the first Covid-19 symptoms. In blood that has been drawn <14 days, it is more difficult for all tests to detect antibodies. So if Covid-19 needs to be confirmed with serology, it is best to do so at least 14 days after the onset of disease. Figure 2 clearly shows that after a mild Covid-19 it is more difficult to detect antibodies. After a severe Covid-19 the tests are positive in 93% to almost 98%, but after mild Covid-19 only 76% to 95% is positive. The specificity is fair to good in all tests: 97% to 100%. A test with 97% specificity is false positive in 3 out of 100 people without a SARS-CoV-2 infection.

**Figure 2: Sensitivity and specificity of six ELISA (or automated) serology tests for the detection of antibodies >14 days after the onset of severe or mild SARS-CoV-2 infection. Tests Included: Wantai SARS-CoV-2 Ab ELISA; EUROIMMUN SARS-CoV-2 IgG; Elecsys® Anti-SARS-CoV-2; LIAISON SARS-CoV-2 IgG; ARCHITECT SARS-CoV-2 IgG; Siemens Healthineers SARS-CoV-2 total antibody test**



Although it is difficult to make a good serology test, serological testing is less complex than PCR. For that reason serology is cheaper, especially if the test is automated. The price of a serological test in a laboratory is about one third of a PCR.

**Figure 3: Example of a rapid test**


Serological rapid tests (figure 3) are of lower quality than ELISA tests, but they are literally fast: results are there in 15 minutes. There is a great variation in quality in the rapid tests, from downright bad to reasonably good. Various laboratories and the RIVM also examined a number of rapid tests for their performance.[1] This was done with smaller numbers of samples than the ELISA, so there is less certainty about the performance of these tests. Though rapid tests are easy to perform, there is also a greater chance of errors when performing the test or reading the result. This does not apply to the results in the RIVM report as these examinations were performed and read in laboratories by experienced analysts. The rapid test is more prone to error in less experienced hands. In addition to a drop of blood or serum, extra liquid (buffer) usually has to be added. The appearance of a control line indicates a successful test. If an extra dash appears, the result is positive. Any result without a control line is invalid.

The RIVM found four rapid tests checked on at least 100 proven Covid-19 negative persons with a specificity over 97%. Three of these tests also have a reasonably good sensitivity to detect IgG antibodies after a severe Covid-19, >14 days after the onset of the disease. But none of the tests are sensitive in subjects after mild SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Suppose you were sick at home last spring for a few days with a fever and sore throat and you want to be sure whether this was due to Covid-19 or not. Then a rapid test is not likely to help you properly. Due to the poor sensitivity to detect mild Covid-19 antibodies, a negative result can well be false negative. And with limited specificity or incorrect execution, a positive result can be false positive.

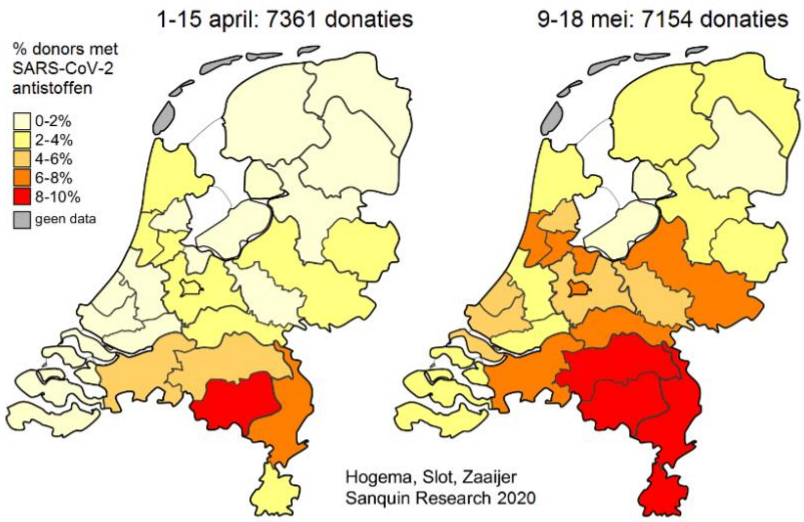
### The use of serology

Why would we do serological testing? The great thing about serology is that it can provide proof of infection even months later. In comparison, the PCR is a snapshot that is only positive during infection. Serology can for example help doctors to understand what caused persistent lung complaints or fatigue. Although most people get better 1 to 2 weeks after a SARS-CoV-2 infection, some people even retain complaints more than 2 months. This clearly shows that the virus can in addition to the lungs cause damage to other organs, such as the heart, brain or even the joints. As a result people may have difficulty regaining their old condition or continue to suffer from headaches or joint pain.

Especially in the first months of the epidemic, not everyone with complaints was tested for the virus. For many people who experienced a (mild) disease between February and May it is therefore unclear whether this was caused by Covid-19. In their case, serology can demonstrate a previous Covid-19, or make SARS-CoV-2 infection less likely.

Besides the abovementioned medical importance of serology, it is also a great tool for epidemiologic research. With a reliable automated test we can check in a large number of people whether they have antibodies in their blood and therefore have been infected with SARS-CoV-2. In the Netherlands, the best-known example of this research was done with blood donors. By testing blood of donors from all over the country, the Sanquin Blood Bank got an impression of how many people became infected in various parts of the Netherlands (figure 4).[2] In the first two weeks of April, 3% of blood donors had antibodies. In May this percentage had risen to 5.4%. By the end of June, the percentage with SARS-CoV-2 antibodies dropped to 4.1%. This decrease is probably due to the fact that most of the donors infected by SARS-CoV-2 had only mild disease or were asymptomatic. Many donors therefore have a low antibody level. With time those low levels drop below the threshold and the serology test can no longer measure it. Because corona antibodies gradually diminish over time, the percentage of positives can drop when there are only few new infections.

**Figure 4: Percentage of blood donors with antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 in April and May**




Another application of serology was used in a nursing home in the village of Budel.[3] Budel was badly affected during the peak of the corona epidemic, and one third of the residents in this nursing home died from Covid-19. Serology of all nursing home employees showed 39% of them to be antibody positive. 19% of all positive employees had been asymptomatic. In fact, more employees may have been infected asymptomatically: for some the serology may already have turned negative.

Those who have antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 are not protected against new infections, but they are most likely protected against serious illness caused by the virus. Equally important do antibodies prevent the virus from much propagation. Antibodies are therefore a barrier against viral spreading. Though there is a lot of uncertainty about this virus, it is clear that our defenses can fight it. The more people with resistance to it, the more often contamination routes die. If the proportion of the population with resistance against SARS-CoV-2 continues to increase the epidemic will at some time come to halt. This resistance of the population is called 'herd immunity'. The average number of people infected by one person, R0 (R zero) or the 'reproduction number', decreases as fewer people are susceptible. R0 decreases thanks to our antibodies. That is the good news for the nursing home in Budel: All employees with antibodies no longer pose a risk, but have become a buffer against new infections.

The number of infections in the Netherlands is by far insufficient for herd immunity. Even during the peak of the epidemic, which already dangerously shook our health care system only a few percent of the population got infected. And research by the blood bank suggests that protection from antibodies does not last for long. We can achieve herd immunity with a good vaccine. Once we have such a vaccine a large part of the population can safely produce antibodies and resistance against SARS-CoV-2. Vaccination is therefore not only in the individual but also in the public interest. Only after massive vaccination can the weaker people in our society return to their 'former normal'.

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## Keep the focus on the big picture: humanity's herd immunity

*By Kathryn Sikkink*

We are in the middle of the most destructive global health crisis since the Spanish Influenza of 1918 and our President has stopped funding the international organization that has done more than any other global actors to address the crisis. What is going on? President Trump likes to find scapegoats to distract attention from his failures of leadership. But let's keep our focus on the big picture.

Rational people don't need to be told that withdrawing funds from WHO in the middle of a global pandemic is reckless and counterproductive. What does Trump have to fear from WHO? More importantly, what are we being distracted from? We are all understandably so worried about flattening the curve and producing the vaccine, that we aren't thinking yet about how what kind of intellectual property arrangement it will take to make the vaccine effective. Without affordable access for everyone, the vaccine can't do its job.

We have something to learn from past disease eradication campaigns, especially the polio and smallpox campaigns. WHO played a central role in each campaign. WHO oversaw the eradication of smallpox, the first time a major human infectious disease was successfully wiped off the earth. This campaign was an example of how superpowers collaborating *with* WHO can change history: the US provided most of the funds and the Soviets most of the vaccines. But states didn't work alone, but were supported by a larger network of corporations, non-governmental organizations and professional associations that helped produce and disseminate knowledge.

The polio case is even more relevant. Polio, like coronavirus, is transmitted person to person, including from asymptomatic individuals. Like the coronavirus, people were terrified of polio. In the years after WWII, polls showed that the only thing people in the United States feared more than polio was nuclear war. There are two vaccines for polio. In the 1950s Jonas Salk invented the inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) administered by injection and Albert Sabin invented the oral polio vaccine (OPV) delivered by oral drops or sugar cubes. The crucial issue is that both Salk and Sabin **did not patent their vaccines,** but rather donated their knowledge for the benefit of humankind. This approach was one crucial factor that has made it possible to almost eradicate polio in the world. Because of the large amount of federal money and charitable donations (through the March of Dimes) used for the invention and testing of the vaccine, Salk believed the patent belonged to the people. Sabin likewise refused to patent his vaccine, to guarantee a more extensive spread of the treatment. He shared it with the Russian army before it was approved by the US government and later donated it to the WHO in 1972 for the eradication campaign.

Like polio, the coronavirus is not an ordinary illness and normal health politics won't work. A completely new and extremely contagious virus for which no members of the world population had any immunity, with asymptomatic transmission of the disease, requires a new solution. As experts in the field of pricing medicines have pointed out, the price of a medicine should allow for meeting the societal need for that product. In any drug market, sellers have power to set prices. In a monopoly market for a new drug, that power is even greater. At a minimum, our governments need to be discussing these issues with all research teams before passing on public funds. If the public knew that the vaccine would be free, it would open up societal sources of funding, just the way that small donations to the March of Dimes help fund the Salk polio vaccine. Coronavirus vaccines could even be crowd sourced, but not if people think they are contributing to windfall profits of a handful of companies.

This is not the strategy Trump is pursuing. On March 1st, in a meeting with 10 top pharmaceutical company executives, reportedly Trump mended some of his bridges with the drug industry, who simultaneously raised his expectations unrealistically about the possibility of a vaccine in the near future. On March 2 the Trump administration offered a large sum to the German firm CureVac, which is developing a COVID-19 vaccine, to move its research to the U.S. Trump apparently believes that to win reelection, he needs a US based vaccine quickly, and to get that, he has to improve relations with the pharmaceutical industry. Just the way he sent stimulus checks with his name on it, Trump wants to give vaccines to Americans first, and with his name on it. That sounds good, until you realize that Trump's plans appear to involve keeping the vaccine from other parts of the world where it is and will be desperately needed. But herd immunity only works if the vast majority of the population is immune. The herd immunity we need it the immunity of the human herd, not just the US herd. Our fates are inextricably linked to the fate of others around the world. The Wall doesn't work with a pandemic. To protect their population fully, leaders around the world must work together to secure rapid and affordable access for everyone. This will not happen if one or a handful of corporations patent the vaccine.

WHO is the main organization working with states to set global norms and practices on health. They have been working for many years to help assure access to essential medicines and vaccines to those most in need. So on April 5th, when the WHO Director General called for countries and companies to voluntarily share intellectual property on COVID-19 medicines, a pharmaceutical industry blog sounded the alarm. WHO's plan for voluntary sharing of intellectual property echoes the way Salk and Sabin helped save the world from polio. But it directly contradicts industry policy on the need for patents to generate robust profits for successful drugs in order to recoup research costs on drugs that never come to fruition.

Change in government and pharmaceutical industry policy will come only as a result of raising awareness about the stakes of the debate, and setting a new agenda with these in mind. The new agenda, in the words of a new social movement, needs to be to "Free the Vaccine" for COVID-19. Such global awareness raising and agenda setting is only now beginning, instigated by WHO, health academics, social movements such as the "Free the Vaccine for COVID-19" campaign, and public-private partnerships like Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

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# CHAPTER IV

# THE GEOGRAPHY OF COVID-19

## The Hague in times of COVID-19

*By Saskia Bruines*

Already since the 19th century, The Hague is known as the international city of Peace and Justice. It hosts a broad coalition of organisations which strive to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both in The Hague and worldwide. The impact of COVID-19 in this community is immense, but with a resilient response, NGOs and IGOs can use this turbulence to trigger growth for the SDG coalition. This requires reflection and learning about current changes, exchange of knowledge between organisations and a cross-boundary approach. The Hague Ecosystem offers the perfect environment to do so.

**The Hague: City of Peace and Justice**

The first roots of The Hague as City of Peace and Justice lie in 1899, when delegates from 26 nations gathered in Huis Ten Bosch for the First Peace conference. This meeting set standards for solving conflicts between nations in the light of modern war technologies. It was soon followed by the Second Peace Conference in 1907, and the building of the Peace Palace in 1913, today housing among others the International Court of Justice.

Ever since, The Hague serves as a gathering place for organisations and people aiming to implement the SDGs, especially SDG 16 concerning the rule of law and access to justice. 480 IGOs are based in The Hague and region and find each other in the International Zone as well as different hubs spread throughout the city, where they all advocate for the SDGs one way or another. Young and ambitious visionaries from all over the world travel to The Hague to the get acquainted with organisations like the UN and to formulate solutions to international challenges during the yearly TEIMUN conference.

Importantly, The Hague also has many change makers implementing the SDGs in our own city. Take for example our *vreedzame wijken* (peaceful neighbourhoods), where children are taught to peacefully solve conflicts.

**Impact of COVID-19 in The Hague**

Unfortunately, COVID-19 does not leave the City of Peace and Justice unaffected. Many citizens of The Hague have a small financial buffer and especially vulnerable people are impacted by the crisis. People with temporary or self-employment, low income and bad health are losing sources of income and risk being hit by poverty. These same people are avoiding asking for medical care out of fear of contamination.[i] Furthermore, immigrants face risks, because access to language education is reduced. Especially those lacking digital skills might get behind.

Youths in The Hague also face big impacts due to the virus. Early signalling of health and development risks were not possible during the lockdown. Youth healthcare workers visited at least 20.000 children less than normally this year. At the same time, safe spaces such as schools, sport clubs and community houses became unavailable. In combination with anxiety and rising unemployment, this could increase the risk of tensions at home.

**Access to justice**

In addition to COVID-19 being a health crisis, humanitarian organisations consider this a global human rights emergency as well. The simultaneous enhanced risk of human rights violations and the reduced options of justice organisations to respond causes a 'widening of the justice gap'[ii]. The pandemic impedes the work of many justice organisations who cannot deploy all their employees. The travel restrictions further limit the options of these organisations.

Furthermore, law enforcement actors have little time to prepare for the implementation of new regulations. New health measures are taken daily, with citizens in some countries facing high fines or imprisonment when breaking the new rules. Human rights organisations worry that this legislation will disproportionately impact those groups who are least able to deal with the shutdown. Especially migrants, detainees, women and children and communities already at risk of injustice are more vulnerable due to the pandemic.[iii]

**Resilient recovery**

The negative impact of COVID-19 in The Hague and worldwide is immense, increasing poverty and reducing access to justice especially for vulnerable populations. However, this moment it also offers an opportunity to reflect on how we can trigger growth for this City of Peace and Justice in a way that it is also felt by its own inhabitants.

As member of the Global Resilient Cities Network (GRCN), The Hague has been aiming exactly doing that, by not only formulating an immediate response the COVID-19 crisis, but also looking forward at how to recover and transform after times of crisis. This approach also offers a great opportunity for the SDG coalition in The Hague to set in motion a resilient recovery. There are several aspects that contribute to such a resilient response.

1. **Reflection on lasting change after COVID-19.**

Many aspects of life change during crises, some of them positive, others negative. By reflecting on them, cities and organisations can use these developments to trigger growth. For the city of The Hague, it was helpful to have the capacity of the Programme Resilient The Hague available to learn from the changes during COVID-19, complementing the crisis response team of the city. To facilitate this learning process, changes can be categorised into the four groups. [iv]

Firstly, when we stop doing something during a crisis, it might be because this was an obsolete activity in the first place or became so due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The challenge is to let of go these, because some pre-crisis logic might prove to be invalid in today's reality. An example is the decline of mass tourism in several European cities due to COVID-19. Already before the COVID-19 outbreak, it became clear that profitable economic activities like these can also have negative impacts on a city.

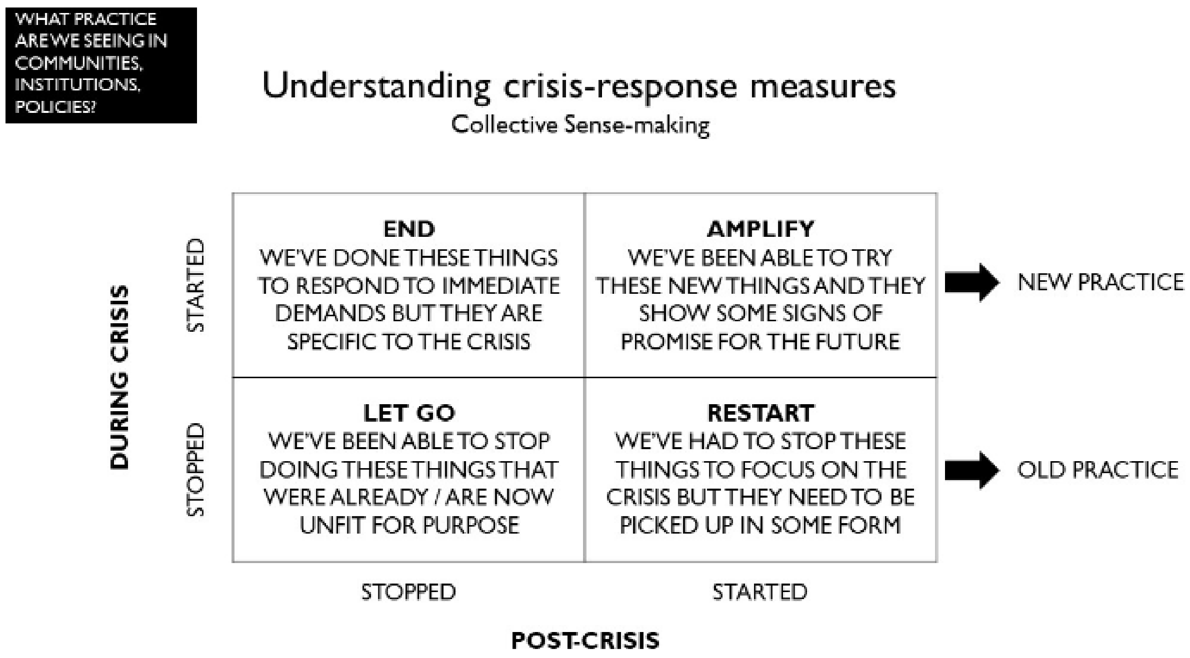
Some activities we paused due to the COVID-19 measures but are good to resume when possible. The question to be asked here is: how do we restart these activities in a way that works in today's reality? This might require creativity. An example is the re-opening of terraces where customers can keep 1,5-meter distance. Innovative solutions popping up everywhere, from building an extra floor on top of the terrace to using greenhouses to prevent spreading of the virus.

Thirdly, there is a set of temporary measures which were considered necessary to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, but we might not want them to be part of our society in the future. One example was the cancellation of the final exams for secondary schools. To accomplish lasting change, it helps to store and make this knowledge available during a next crisis.

Finally, there are initiatives responding to the COVID-19 crisis which prove to be an asset to our communities and could be kept or even accelerated. One example is the increased social cohesion and support to neighbours which could be seen everywhere in The Hague. Another one is the opening of one temporary central phone line for vulnerable citizens of The Hague with financial and health related questions during the COVID crisis.

In addition to this, it appeared timely that the City of The Hague started an inventory among its citizens, together with HiiL (The Hage Institute for Innovation of Law), about where access to justice at this moment is most compromised. We will then use the experience available in our justice community to develop innovative solutions – of which many are available worldwide – to improve access to justice for our citizens.

In short, the SDG coalition has many changes to be reflected on to use today's turbulent times to bring about a positive transformation. Less traveling, the rapid development of online meeting technologies and the quick transformation of the fundraising landscape are only a few examples. If the SDG community manages to restart pre-corona policies and accelerate new and innovative measures in a way that recognizes the reality of today, they have the potential to trigger real and lasting growth.




*Source: Ian Burbidge (2020) How to create real, lasting change after Covid-19, available at [www.thersa.org](www.thersa.org)*

2. **The COVID-19 virus is not limited by sectoral boundaries, and neither should the SDG coalition.**

It is now more evident than ever that cities and organisations worldwide face the same challenges and opportunities. Being a member of the Global Resilient Cities Network, The Hague has had the unique opportunity to frequently talk to cities such as Rotterdam, Milan, Belfast, Tel Aviv and Medellin about how they aim to recover and transform in times of COVID-19. This resulted in The

Hague participating in the Tel Aviv Hackathon aiming to save local businesses while at the same time supporting communities in need. The cities also helped and inspired each other in conducting Corona Resilience Assessments in their cities to identify opportunities to recover and transform during COVID-19.

While studying the impact of COVID-19, it becomes apparent that COVID-19 is not merely a health crisis. The spill over effects to the economic, legal and social domains demonstrate that the reality in which we pursue the SDGs is complex and interlinked. This calls for cooperation past the boundaries of the seventeen SDGs which were formulated to guide our aim to create peace and prosperity for people and the planet. Manchester provides a good example of how the cultural sector played an important role in the recovery after the bombing in 2017. The same could be applied to creatively adapt public spaces to fulfil the social distancing requirements. This example shows how the collaboration between urban planners and artists can contribute to a pleasant and safe city while providing work for the cultural sector.

The Hague's ecosystem offers the perfect environment for the exchange of experiences and holistic approach to sustainable development. This moment, where our dependencies become apparent and we are more than before united by facing the same crisis, provides a window of opportunity for International Institutions in The Hague to find each other and collaborate. Think about a collaboration between healthcare experts and human rights defenders come up with methods of tracking COVID-19 cases without compromising privacy rights. With all the knowledge combined, these institutions should be able to formulate proposals towards a resilient recovery of the SDG coalition.

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## COVID-19 Pandemic: The Litmus Test to Indonesia's Decentralization System

*By Dominique Virgil*

**Background**

Since its first discovery in December 2019, COVID-19 has rapidly spread across countries, infecting millions of people and caused millions of deaths. The world as we know it has been put into a halt, forcing us to adapt to the "new normal" being confined at home. The world is struggling because of the same strain of virus, but some countries are facing a less fortunate situation in handling the pandemic, including Indonesia.

Indonesia is the biggest archipelago in the world, with 200 million inhabitants spreading in 17,508 islands and 34 provinces. Its wide geographical area and the difficulty to monitor each province from its capital, Jakarta, triggered the reform of the centralized system to a decentralized one after the reign of Soeharto in 2000. This reform mandates regencies and municipalities bigger authorities on certain sectors, including in determining programs and policies according to the interest of their respective communities and areas.

The litmus test to this system is taking a form of COVID-19, especially when recently, the number of cases spike with no signs of diminishing. This situation is in contrast with Indonesia's neighbouring countries - like Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam - which are on the edge of winning the war against the pandemic. The multifaceted and multisectoral impact of COVID-19 in Indonesia is exacerbated by the overlapping parts of function held by the governments in the national, province, regency, and municipality levels.

**Indonesia's Decentralization Policy**

As mentioned above, Indonesia's decentralization policy gives the government in each regency, municipality and province an autonomy to control its own area. It was first initiated by the issuance of the Decree of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) No. XV/MPR/1998 on the implementation of regional autonomy; arrangement, distribution and utilization of equitable national resources; and central and regional fiscal balance in the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. In 1999, Law No. 22 of 1999 on the Local Government was enacted. After undergoing some amendments, the whole arrangement on decentralization policy is now governed under Law No. 9 of 2015 on the Second Amendment of the Law No. 23 of 2014 on Local Government.

The law provides a clear task division between the Central and Local Governments. The Central Government is responsible to manage sectors that fall under the category of "absolute government affairs", such as foreign affairs, defense and security, judiciary, national monetary and fiscal, and religion.

On the other hand, the Local Government will be responsible to manage sectors categorized as "mandatory government affairs". These sectors include education, health, public works and spatial planning, public housing and residential areas, peace, public order, community protection, and social affairs. The Local Government is also in charge of matters related to labour, women empowerment and child protection, food, land, environment, administration and civil registration, community and villages empowerment, population control and family planning, transportation, communication and information, cooperative and MSMEs, investment, youth and sports.

**Intersectionality of COVID-19 Impacts**

Despite originally starting as a public health crisis, the impact of COVID-19 extends beyond the State's health capacity and affects their socio-economic landscape. The economy is collapsing. Too many people are pushed into poverty, partially as a result of massive job losses. Social safety net programs of the Government are greatly rigged as they did not reach their intended beneficiaries. It is very difficult to create a harmonious program between the Central and Local Governments to beat COVID-19 as they are authorized with handling different public health, economic, and labour issues.

As per 31 July 2020, Indonesia still has the most COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia with a total of 108,376 cases, triumphing its neighbouring Philippines and Singapore with approximately 1,000 positive cases per day. [i]

**Different COVID-19 Handling between the Central and Local Governments**

Ever since its first discovery in Wuhan, China, it is a public secret that Ministers and Central Government's authorities did not take the risk of this pandemic seriously. From 1 January to 5 April 2020, there were 37 statements from the Government that undermine COVID-19 risk, according to the research by the Institute of Research, Education, Economic and Social Information Institute (*Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan, Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial,* abbreviated as LP3ES).[ii] Indonesia's Vice President said that COVID-19 could not enter Indonesia because of the power of a prayer; while the Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs stated that complicated regulations disabled COVID-19 from entering Indonesia.

Mismatch and inconsistency between the Central Government's officials were also highlighted, one of which is during Eid holiday. Indonesians have the tradition of going back to their hometown to visit their families every Eid, but COVID-19 pandemic would put them in danger. President Joko Widodo has addressed Indonesians and banned them from going back to their hometown, but the Presidential Spokesperson and the Coordinating Minister of Maritime Affairs and Investment revised the statement; allowing Indonesians to go back to their hometown as long as they isolate themselves.

Backfires and criticisms,[iii] even by the World Health Organization (WHO), seem to outshine the performance of many local governments who are deemed more successful in responding to the pandemic.

The Governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, was among the first leaders who recognised the possible severity of COVID-19 if not being responded rapidly. When the Central Government was still contemplating whether lockdown was favourable, Governor Anies already proposed to the Central Government to impose lockdown in Jakarta, which was then rejected. The Government did not want the same chaos happening in India and Italy to happen in Indonesia, and the instruction to impose lockdown fell under the Central Government's mandate.[iv] Despite the rejection, Jakarta still became the first city to impose a large scale social restriction (referred to as PSBB[v]) on 10 April 2020,[vi] after the Central Government announced that it was preferable compared to lockdown.

Mayor of Tegal also decided to impose local lockdown in March, despite the warning from the Central Government, after a person that came home from Abu Dhabi tested positive for COVID-19.[vii] The same step was taken by the Governor of Papua and Mayor of Banda Aceh, by closing down entry access for people outside of the area to perform more robust and widespread health monitoring.[viii]

Indonesia is also hit hard by the pandemic since the availability of health facilities and equipment are not enough to cater the spike of people needing treatment as a result of COVID-19 infection. Art 171 and 172 of the 2009 Health Law has given the authority to the Local Government to allocate 10% of the Regional Budget for health, allocated for health services, especially for the poor, the elderly, and unaccompanied children. However, the spending of this budget remains unclear, since hospitals across regions are still lacking adequate health equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

To address the shortage of health equipment and PPE, the Central Government started to purchase those from other States and also shift the production of domestic industry into PPE. The provision of health equipment and PPE falls under the responsibility of the Central Government according to the Elucidation of the 2014 Local Government Law. However, Art 82 of the 2009 Health Law stipulates that both Central and Local Government are responsible to ensure the provision of resources, facilities, and the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable health services in the event of a disaster. Art 82 also provides that the financing of health services in disasters is borne by both Central and Local Government, which again shows conflicting and overlapping mandates.

The effectiveness of distribution of health equipment and PPE to the regions also depends on how the Central Government manages the distribution. There is a case of feud between the Mayor of Surabaya and the Governor of East Java which hampers the effectiveness of their COVID-19 handling. Surabaya was unable to impose large-scale social restriction earlier since the Governor of East Java said that no coordination happened. Besides, PCR tests allocated for Surabaya were also shifted for other cities by the East Java Governor, without even coordinating with the Mayor.[ix]

Another issue is on the social safety net for the community. COVID-19 in Indonesia was declared as a national non-natural disaster through the Presidential Decree No. 12 of 2020 on 13 April 2020.[x] In the Elucidation of the 2014 Local Government Law, in case of a national disaster, the provision of basic needs and recovery of trauma for victims falls under the authority of the Central Government.

Despite the mandate in the 2014 Local Government Law, Art. 8 of the 2007 Disaster Management Law stipulates that the Local Government is responsible to guarantee the fulfillment of the people's rights affected by disasters, protect the community from the effects of disaster, conduct disaster risk reduction, and allocate their Regional Budget for disaster response/management fund. However, emphasis is given in Art. 69 of the 2007 Disaster Management Law that the victims of disasters that experience job losses will be given loans for their businesses, using the budgets arranged by both Central and Local Governments.

The seemingly conflicting authorities between Central and Local Government during disasters in Indonesia are tested again during this pandemic. Every province, city and regency has different arrangements of their Regional Budget to be allocated for COVID-19 response, including the social safety net. While Jakarta becomes the region which allocates the highest proportion of its regional budget for COVID-19 response,[xi] the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that the number of local governments that do not comply with the procedures of Regional Budget reallocation remain unknown as per late April 2020.[xii] Robust monitoring of how the budget is being spent is certainly needed to further mitigate the impacts of this pandemic.

It is quite challenging for both Central and Local Governments to collaborate on the provision of social safety net since the Central Government created a range of different programs with possibility of overlapping beneficiaries. Although Local Governments have allocated their budget for social safety net, its distribution would need to wait for the social assistance from the Central Government, meaning that more time is needed to organize the distribution. The Governor of West Java criticized this by pointing out that the Central Government's data is not synchronized. The National Statistics Agency, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration have their own survey and data on those in need of social assistance.[xiii]

**The Power of People Solidarity**

The pandemic undoubtedly shatters our life, and no one is ready to fathom its devastating impact, including the Governments around the world. Yes, the Indonesian Central Government might seem to fall short, but a more contextual and holistic perspective is needed. The local governments of Indonesia have been doing massive improvements, strengthened by the strong solidarity and communality among the communities. COVID-19 does not break the social cohesion, but it unites people. There may be some cases uncovered by the media, but the spirit of communality among Indonesians has surely helped the Government to mitigate the impacts.

In Yogyakarta, some communities had the initiative to impose their own "social restriction" or local lockdown, without any instruction from the local government. They decided to only open one road for people entering or leaving their village and closed down the others, to better control the traffic of people.[xiv] Besides, the residents in some villages in Yogyakarta also opened up public kitchen and cooked food to be distributed to those who need them, including students from outside Yogyakarta.[xv]

In Purwokerto, Central Java, a businessman named Brili Agung Zaky Pradika provided his hotel to be temporary accommodation for health workers who were treating COVID-19 patients. This was caused by the cases where health workers were kicked out from their rented houses or rooms because the residents were afraid of contracting COVID-19 from them.[xvi]

In addition, a foundation named The Indonesian Disaster Awareness Movement Foundation (*Yayasan Gerakan Indonesia Sadar Bencana,* referred to as Graisena) provided free health check-up for 1,000 residents in Jakarta and its satellite cities, such as Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, dan Bekasi; altogether called as a Greater Jakarta Area. The foundation also gave staple foods for 2,000 families around the area to help them survive during the pandemic.[xvii]

Not only Indonesian nationals, refugees in Indonesia also contribute to the society. In Medan, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Indonesia, some of the refugee women, supported by partner Mapanbumi, are producing washable face masks. They aim to produce 1,000 masks that will be distributed to vulnerable Indonesians and those who continue to work outside their homes in order to support themselves and their families, such as rickshaw (*becak*) drivers, street cleaners and the elderly in 18 sub-districts.[xviii]

Other generous foundations, communities, companies and individuals have also donated enormous amounts of basic needs and PPE to those who need them the most, filling the gaps caused by the Government's limited capacity.

**Entering the New Normal?**

Four months after the first COVID-19 case occurred in Indonesia, the Government decided to reactivate business activities by relaxing social restriction methods. However, this causes a rising number of COVID-19 clusters in office buildings. 300 people across three (3) companies in Semarang, Central Java, were recently tested positive of contracting COVID-19, as stated by the Head of Semarang City Health Office, Abdul Hakam in his 10 July-statement. The three industries failed to adequately implement the mandatory health protocol.[xix]

Not only in Semarang, Jakarta is also struggling with the possibilities of new clusters in office buildings,[xx] also caused by the inadequate implementation of health protocol. Responses of the company's management also vary. Government's offices also become the cluster of new COVID-19 cases,[xxi] raising questions on the adequacy of health protocol in place, including its monitoring.

Unfortunately, not every region is ready to reopen businesses and get the people back on the wheel, but the urge of boosting economic growth to save the national economy from recession is also pressing. Art. 250 of the 2014 Local Government Law has provided that regulations made by governors, regents or mayors should not be contrary to public interest, which includes disruption to the economic activities to improve the welfare of the community. The implementation of this provision is shown in many local regulations who only regulate the guidance on COVID-19 health protocols for employers and employees, refraining from disrupting economic activities.

Some provinces have been extending the large-scale social restriction for multiple times since April, including Jakarta, because of the rising number of COVID-19 cases. However, workers have started going back to their workplaces despite the restriction, raising questions on whether such restriction is really effective in the first place. The decision to halt business activities to prevent further spread of COVID-19 is not independently held by the local government, and it poses an even more difficult task for the local government to ensure the capacity of health workers and facilities in their region and the provision of social assistance in these trying times.

**Conclusion**

As seen above, COVID-19 becomes a litmus test to the decentralization system in Indonesia and succeeded to prove so far that changes are desperately needed to make it better.

First is on pandemic, or in general, disaster preparedness. The local governments, as mentioned above, were given the mandate to allocate a certain percentage of their regional budget to provide health service, especially for the vulnerable communities. However, the practice differs among each region and the lack of monitoring mechanism to measure progress from both Central and

Local Government authorities gives a bigger power to a pandemic to shatter the health services' capacity to respond.

Second is on the authority of the local governments. Despite giving the Local Governments bigger authority, crucial decisions during the pandemic are still held by the Central Government, including the provision of health equipment and PPE, the initiation of a large-scale social restriction, and the social safety net programs. The local government should be given bigger authority to take any measure on the first instance, including the allocation and distribution of the social safety net programs or decision to impose a large-scale social restriction, to rapidly respond to the problem on the ground. If further assistance is needed, then the Central Government may intervene. This could prevent unnecessary delay, especially during the pandemic.

Third is on the orientation of the policy. Communities, especially those who are more vulnerable, should also be at the heart of policy consideration. Communities should not be the glue that closes down the loopholes in Government's policies; forced to act because the Government's incapability in making a sound policy with clear purposes. Instead, policies should empower communities to contribute to the pandemic response. The involvement of communities can only be effectively initiated if the Local Governments are given bigger authority to decide on crucial issues, instead of needing to wait for the Central Government to act.

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## Personal reflections: COVID-19 & The Adaptation of Strathmore University in Kenya

*By Allan Mukuki*

In March 2020, Kenya announced its first COVID-19 case. This came with several raft measures issued via numerous executive orders. Key among which was in the Presidential Address of 15th March 2020, was the suspension of learning in all education institutions with immediate effect. What this meant for Strathmore Law School where I am a lecturer, was that the last week of exams had been effectively suspended, and everything was left in abeyance.

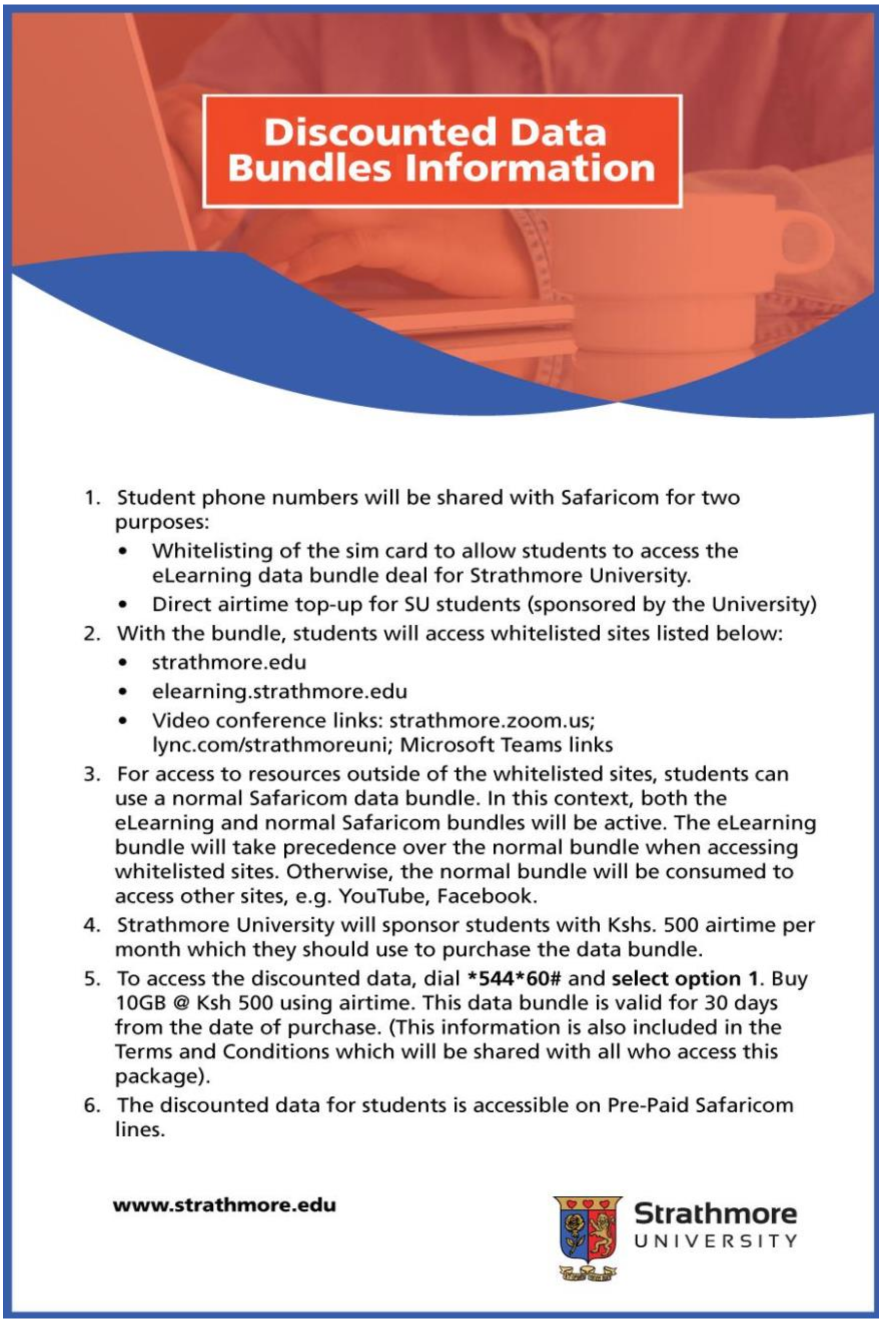
Indeed, confusion abound and here we are as an institution, thrown into disarray. New students who were joining Strathmore University had to now stay at home; New semesters had to be rethought as to how best to undertake them; New mode of exams had to be thought about etc.

Charles Darwin opined that, "It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change." Strathmore University had to adapt and do so fast and this as I agree with many others, occasioned the acceleration of the fourth industrial revolution or what has been called the digital revolution phase.

Indeed, survive we did, the cogs of the various departments of the Universities began to roll, the University developed Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning policies; zoom accounts were purchased for the various faculties; the other beauty was that we already had a Moodle ingrained e-learning platform that was embedded with the BigBlueButton which is a video medium too and also our University emails, we were connected to Microsoft Teams at no extra cost as well as Google Meet. The next step was to teach the faculty as to how to utilize these platforms to teach. Trainings upon training were conducted and facilities provided as well, in that, lecturers without laptops were provided with the same to facilitate their equipping for the next semester which was now agreed upon to be online in the form of an Emergency Remote Teaching format.

Whilst this was happening, Strathmore University students had not realised that they were ahead of their time and their peers. This is in the concept that all students in Strathmore are given a laptop upon admission into the University. This was the next frontier of training where students were trained as to how to undertake classes via the aforementioned platforms.

The next frontier was to enable each student and lecturer to be equipped with internet bundles to be able to attend classes, and to do so without an extra cost to the students. I share a notice below as to how this was made possible:




As illustrated, all the necessities were achieved and now the next step was to put to work all the training that had been done. The Online Unrestricted Open Book Exams was the first frontier of this new ERT system, of the pending exams. All were done smoothly and marked online successfully. This then with a few tweaks showed the readiness of the system to now be used for teaching.

Since July 2020, when the Academic Year of Strathmore Law School started, the ERT has been nothing short of a success. Despite teaching online not being a favourable concept due to screen fatigue, the reliance on external factors such as electricity and the availability of internet, and also the lack of a physical engagement with students in a class setting, my classes and many others have occurred and continue doing so successfully.

Strathmore University has adapted and got it right on the management of COVID-19 disruptions and indeed in my personal reflection having been involved in these strategies and seeing them at work in Strathmore Law School especially, we have managed change as quoted before and we have 'adapted so as not to die' as an educational institution and indeed the accelerated digital revolution is with us and is here to stay, hence adaptation in all sectors of the world is now key to ensure survival through this revolution.

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## War and the Coronavirus pandemic and the collapse of socio economic structure

*By Sima Samar*

Coronavirus is a menace to world security, stability and economic development. It also impacts the social and cultural foundations of our world in an unprecedented way. The spread of the virus has been truly global and it is a pandemic with long lasting impact. Though the spread of the virus has affected every country in the world and in different ways, it has struck some vulnerable and poor nations seriously. Afghanistan is a country that has been affected by the spread of the coronavirus and has little capacity and limited resources to cope with the impact of the pandemic. Containing the spread of the pandemic is already challenged by the continuation of war and everyday terror attacks against the cities, villages and killing civilians and causes political instability.

Because of the continuation of war and conflict, despite tremendous efforts and support from the international community, the country already lacked an effective healthcare system, a social security mechanism and a strong rule of law system to enforce policy decisions needed to prevent the spread of the virus, including quarantine, social distancing and forcing businesses and companies to comply with the necessary health guidelines.

On the other hand, political instability and tension over control of power has worn the energy of timely and effective policy making mechanisms and implementation down to little effect. The country was just brought back from the brink of a new stage of chaos and disorder by a power sharing agreement, after months of standoff between president Ghani and Dr. Abdullah over the contested result of presidential elections that were held last September.

The four decades of war and conflict in Afghanistan and the escalation of war by the emboldened Taliban and ISIS after the February agreement with the USA, has been devastating. The ensued problem of insecurity, every day terror and attack against cities and villages and major disruption of health provision by threats against medical personnel and distribution of medical equipment and awareness raising programs has its negative effect on the efforts against the spread of coronavirus. Taliban and ISIS have always treated medical staff and medical services as a cover for covert operations.

In the absence of real data, it is hard to make an assessment of the impact of the virus on the economy of Afghanistan. However, with 54% of Afghans living below the poverty line, which is more than 70% among minorities and marginalized segments of society like women and people with disability, the impact could be dire for the poor and vulnerable groups. The entire economy is shut down or forced to seize because of the closing of borders or quarantine of the cities.

The response to coronavirus has been threefold. On the 18th of March 2020, the Afghan government declared a quarantine in the cities of Kabul and Herat and also advised many other cities to follow suit. Staying home, closing businesses and public and government administration, not opening schools and universities for the new educational year, banning travel between cities, and stopping flights were part of the first front of the policy. The other front of the policy was using the 600 million aid from major Afghan donors like the World Bank, EU, USAID and Asian Development Bank to support the programs against the pandemic in Afghanistan. The government allocated some money for each province and prepared extra beds; it even built new hospitals.

It also started distribution of basic food items and recently bread to poor and impoverished populations. Though the number of beneficiaries and the soundness of the policy is questioned.

The rapid spread of coronavirus in Afghanistan is an indication to the potency and extremely contiguous nature of the virus, but also an indication of several flaws in the chronically weak system of Afghanistan's healthcare, policy making and its implementation and rule of law. For example, the committee that was assigned to lead efforts against coronavirus lacked leadership, direction and suffered from a fragmented decision making approach. The efforts were under criticism from both the public, civil society and even the parliament and senate. The most criticized part was the distribution of 4 kg wheat to families in the west of Kabul as opposed to full bags of 50 kg of wheat to some other areas. Critics found it both discriminatory and also ineffective. The official in charge replied to the critic as a trial project which further infuriated people, thus backfiring.

The other factor that impacts the fight against the spread of the virus is the disbelief of a majority in the existence or danger of the virus. Mullahs and religious leaders have been divided over the virus. Part of the group following the good practice of other Islamic countries called for compliance with the government issued guidance on prevention of the virus. But more radical parts of the religious group openly defied the guidance and rejected the existence or the danger of the virus against the Muslim community. This situation has been exacerbated by the general disbelief of Afghans in the government's services and policy. Big parts of the population accused the government of corruption and using coronavirus to attract international financial assistance.

All the above and the inability of the government to run a successful and convincing awareness program allowed people to defy the stay home order, and crowd the cities before the quarantine ends, which rendered the government effort ineffective.

Like every other disaster and pandemic crisis, women and children are more vulnerable and subject to the worst. In the wake of the spreading pandemic, the UN Secretary General called violence against women a problem to be attended to. Afghanistan, as a country with some of the worst cases of violence against women and a harmful tradition where women are subject to domestic violence, forced and early marriage and deprivation of liberty and personal freedoms was a case of serious concern.

During the coronavirus, many public and government agencies providing services to women were closed. Though it is not known how many cases of domestic violence have been registered, the assessment of existing violence against women in a new situations where men share space with women for longer hours, could predict a raise in the number of cases where violence is used against women. It is not the only problem women are facing during coronavirus, women also had to bear the economic impact of the coronavirus on families. Because of rampant poverty among women, especially women that are the breadwinner of their families, the impact of coronavirus has been severe.

A number of cases of women infected by coronavirus is lower than men according to the daily and accumulated official report on Covid-19. However, it might not reflect the actual reality of the pandemic affecting women. The harmful tradition, poverty and lack of access to the healthcare system limits women’s access to Corona tests and their illness could not be reported to the health official. In addition, women's access to healthcare is threatened by war and terror. An attack on the 12th of May on a maternity hospital which claimed the lives of over 26 mothers, born and unborn babies and nurses illustrated a tragic situation of ongoing threats and risks associated with daily life in Afghanistan.

But despite all challenges, it is important to not lose focus and continue to fight both war and coronavirus simultaneously. As much as it seems challenging and beyond the resources and power of Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries in the world, the country would emerge resilient. The country has to learn from the best practices of the world and adopt them in our socio economic context.

The international community has been generous in providing aid, PPE and test kits to Afghanistan. Despite their own crisis at home, others tried to help Afghanistan in this difficult time. They have been supporting Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism and militant groups in the past two decades and are now supporting the nation against the pandemic. Their assistance and expertise must be put in good use and spent effectively. Previous mistakes and failures could help the government to learn their lessons and do such things more effectively.

To revive a war affected economy is not an easy job, having an economy dependent on aid, the country has to adopt certain new guidelines in opening up the economy. This requires there to be political will, resources, management, technology and a good surveillance system in place. The country has to focus on how to help people and businesses affected by the covid-19 pandemic without nepotism. In the absence of any real data and assistance schemes, support and assistance to businesses who have connections with the government will not help the economy.

The fight against corruption should be continued and strengthened. A post covid-19 era would present a harsh economic outlook to the world and therefore Afghanistan will receive less financial assistance. Fighting corruption would help that the country could use the reduced aid and diminishing revenue more effectively and efficiently.

The virus pandemic has and may change the social structure forever. Adopting the new normal for Afghans would prove challenging. But it is essential that educating people about these changes and reducing the impact are considered. For example, supporting women to get an education because of their role in maintaining the society safe is essential. There is also a need to reject prejudice and discrimination against returnees, women and IDPs. We should not allow violence, hatred and fear to overwhelm our society. The country has to be united and care for everyone with no discrimination. It is essential to focus on promotion and protection and respect for human rights and human dignity.

Afghanistan has to invest in the healthcare system. The private and public health providers struggle to provide effective services. Investing in healthcare management and enacting effective regulations to oversee the management and administration of health care would help the health sector to improve.

We need more medical staff, but with quality education, training and commitment. Gender programming for an effective healthcare system is a must. Our education system should not discriminate against women and bring more women to the field. We have been witnessing the failure of the healthcare system by having very limited capacity to provide healthcare to women.

An even more important task is to end the violence. The call for a ceasefire and end of violence has been growing louder both at the global level and from our region. The Taliban should respect the call and end violence. The government also needs to have a clear policy on how to end the violence and reach an agreement with the Taliban.

Afghanistan's future and wellbeing are very much dependent on the support from the international community and aid from the region. They should coordinate and their path of work and assistance should converge. Leaving Afghanistan and allowing chaos and the Taliban to roam over the country would be dangerous, and it will reach everywhere.

Finally, one lesson that we all should learn is that the military power and investing in militarization will not protect countries and people from Pandemics such as Covid 19. The investment in social services and a human rights based approach to development might be stronger tools for human security and stability. Terrorism and viruses have similarities and it will not stay within the geography of one country. It is a proven fact that these can reach any place at any time.

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# CHAPTER V

# COVID-19 AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Remarks by Frans Timmermans at the meeting of Environment Ministers

*By Frans Timmermans, excerpt of speech given at meeting of European environment ministers, 23 June 2020, Brussels*

*We thank the European Commission for allowing us to republish this excerpt. Some formatting changes were made. The original, full length speech can be found on the website of the European Commission.*

**We will not go back to business as usual**

The COVID19 crisis is the biggest challenge Europe has faced since the Second World War. We need to face this challenge with measures that are future-oriented and not oriented towards the past.

When the European Commission worked on the plans for recovery, we had a couple of principles. First, we need to act fast. Second, the response needs to be proportionate to the challenge and so we need to do a lot. And third, we need to create a level playing field and therefore solidarity has to be an essential part of what we do. On top of that, we also came to the conclusion that **the risk of throwing money at the old economy of the 20th century is huge**. If we did this, we would create locked-in assets that would not allow us to transform our economy, which needs to be transformed anyway because of the climate crisis that is not going to go away, because of the biodiversity crisis that we face, and because we are in the middle of an industrial revolution.

All these things combined mean that **we need to invest in the future**. I know as a politician that the risk is always there: when we are in trouble, we start spending money on things that have no future. If we are asking our children to contribute to a recovery, by allowing us to go onto the financial markets to get subsidies and loans, then we have to have something to offer for our kids as well, which is an environment that is better and an economy that is future proof. This ensures that the temperature does not rise above 1.5 degrees, so that we avoid a number of tipping points that would seriously harm our society and economy in the future. **We want a green transition, a digital transition and we want to increase Europe's resilience**.

For the European Commission, it is clear: **we are not going back to business as usual**. You see it everywhere in your countries. We all see that we cannot just recover on the basis of where we were before. **Restructuring will be an essential part of all the efforts we do, nationally and at the European level**. So let us make sure that restructuring goes into the right direction, so that there will be jobs for our kids, sustainable jobs, so that we will limit the rise of the temperature to 1.5 degrees and so that we will save biodiversity in Europe and worldwide. Let us also make sure that we will lead with a circular economy and other parts of the economy in the world, so that we become an example for transition also elsewhere.

*Frans Timmermans is a Dutch politician and since 2019 the Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal in the European Commission.*

## An essay on the influence of Covid-19 on the European Union

*By Bernard Bot*

Will the Covid-19 pandemic give convergence and solidarity in the EU a new boost? Is there a fair chance that it will bring its members closer together? Or is it threatening the EU's very existence, deepening the rift between North and South or East and West? I am optimistic and believe this scourge presents an ideal opportunity for constructive innovations. History has shown that EU members in times of crises will support each other come what may. We see clear signs that this is already the case. But I am realistic enough to realize that it will not be easy to overcome old rivalries and deeply ingrained suspicions overnight.

Against this backdrop I would like to stress three elements that seem crucial to me for reinvigorating the EU area. The first one is *cohesion*, holding firmly on to each other and avoiding further break-ups, ideological or physical. The second one is *solidarity*, the willingness to support weaker members financially and structurally. A third one is *innovation*, not letting this crisis go to waste but use it to strengthen and renew EU institutions and the internal decision making process. The time furthermore seems ripe to start implementing ambitious plans dealing with environment, migration, water shortage and cybercrime, among others. If the older generation is too set in its ways and too eager to return to the "old normal," it should be up to the younger generation to take bold steps towards renewal. For me these three elements are inseparable. Forging and maintaining unity and cohesion between the EU members inevitably requires a fair degree of solidarity bolstered by innovative thinking.

The importance of *cohesion* and convergence seem self-evident in this bleak period. If we want to survive the Covid-19 crisis, we must cooperate. This is all the more urgent since recent history, unfortunately, points in the direction of gradual disintegration rather than convergence. A tendency has been noticeable to resort to national remedies, closed borders and calls for taking control back from Brussels. Populist movements in many European member states continue to threaten European cohesion with their stress on a return to the nation state as the ideal form of government. In its most unfortunate form we have seen this philosophy leading to the (Br)exit of an important EU member. Such anti-EU movements are still gaining in popularity in many member states. Reason enough to be vigilant and use this crisis to demonstrate our belief in the necessity of closer unity, faith in European cooperation and mutual support. It is the least we can do if we want to survive and prosper in a hostile international environment .

Fortunately there are also strong developments signaling continued *solidarity* among the member states. Not long ago the European commission submitted plans for financial support to be embedded in and added to the multiannual EU budget (1.074 billion) to the tune of 750 billion euros. Equally innovative, the European commission proposed to borrow this money directly on the capital market and to disburse it to needy member states in the form of grants and loans. In that way the EU hopes to tackle the socio-economic consequences of the covid-19 pandemic. Strict conditions are attached in order to oblige receiving states to introduce long overdue economic and budgetary reforms. Equally encouraging is the fact that this proposal was preceded by an unexpected revival of Franco-German cooperation: the steam engine of the EU coming back to life with this post-Covid EU recovery plan.

These proposals are surprisingly innovative and audacious, but initially not all EU members were equally enthusiastic. Especially the North-South divide was deepening as a result of these proposals. The so-called frugal four, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden voiced their displeasure and wished to impose on the recipients stricter conditions concerning, among others, restructuring national budgets. But in the end solidarity overcame all hesitations and objections. True as that may be, the question seems justified whether the frugal four were entirely wrong in their insistence on financial rectitude and the necessity to restructure national budget deficits. Just spreading helicopter money unconditionally over countries or regions will not bring about long-term economic and financial health. Reason enough to take into account some of the ideas and suggestions of these more critical member states. The last word on these issues has certainly not yet been spoken, but it is my conviction that the compromise reached between July 17 and 21 of this year by the Special European Council will signal the start of renewed efforts towards stronger convergence and solidarity.

Will the pandemic also lead to an ever closer union as laid down in the preamble of the Lisbon Treaty? Sticking together in times of crisis is one thing, but more is needed. *Innovation* in many fields is long overdue if the EU wants to retain its position as an innovative continent and the largest trade bloc in the world. A revision, furthermore, of the European institutional framework is long overdue encompassing its opaque governance structure and new forms of cooperation such as opt-ins, opt-outs and core groups. As mentioned earlier, the challenges of climate change, migration from Africa and Asia, cyberattacks, water shortage, organized crime or terrorism have not vanished. They also have to be tackled sooner rather than later. Certainly, solving these problems cannot be the EU's responsibility alone. The best way to deal with them would be globally. At this juncture, unfortunately, support from outside the EU cannot be taken for granted. A traditional ally such as the USA is absorbed by a bitter election fight. And president Trump is not known as a fan of multilateral cooperation except if it suits his personal ambitions. China will not be very helpful either unless eventual support would contribute tangibly to its own progress. It certainly does not hide its ambition to become the world's superpower within the next decades, leaving the EU far behind. It will probably support the EU only if it can snap up strategic firms or grab precious infrastructure and national resources projects. Russia is besieged by a myriad of problems ranging from low oil prices to a rapidly greying population and weak government. One might even say that the EU is surrounded by a "hostile ring of fire." One thing is sure: if the EU wants to tackle these urgent international issues successfully, it has to act in unison. Every member state individually must convince its citizens that the EU is better off as an indivisible entity rather than as a loose alliance of nations. Equally important is that young people should be involved right from the start and given the opportunity to submit new ideas and initiatives. Shouldn't TEIMUN be instrumental in this direction and inspire young people to take the lead?

I stress this point because there are pessimists who fear that the EU will snap back to its old behavior once the pandemic is over. History teaches us that people are in principle averse to significant changes after a crisis. I agree that we will not wake up in a totally different world, but this crisis is different from all other ones. It should inspire us therefore to put new initiatives on the rail as soon as possible.

And why would such initiatives not be successful? During the almost seventy years of its existence the EU has demonstrated that it is capable of major changes and bold innovations at regular intervals. Often at unexpected moments and within a historically speaking brief timespan. It has grown in waves of expansion from six members to twenty-seven, it has evolved from a primitive common market system to a sophisticated economic and monetary union with a smoothly functioning internal market. Controversies have been its part all along the road, but the urge to integrate and to invest together in its future has been overriding. So, in spite of all the misgivings and criticism there is enough to be proud of. Meanwhile the EU must continue to reinvent itself over and over again. Major challenges require major initiatives. A result-oriented approach seems desirable, but a touch of vision and magnanimity would be more than welcome.

*Bernard Bot is a diplomat that served as the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2003 and 2007. Additionally, he served as the permanent representative of the Netherlands to the EU from 1992 – 2003 and was Chairman of the Clingendael Institute in The Hague. Bernard Bot is member of the TEIMUN Honorary Leadership Committee.*

## Lessons learned from the European debt crisis

*By Thomas Stavrinos*

Several years have passed since the Euro faced its first existential crisis after the turmoil of the US financial markets sparked a worldwide recession back in 2008. Twelve years later the euro faces yet another crisis at its doorstep that threatens to shake the foundations of the Economic and Monetary union (EMU) once again. This time the threat appeared in the form of the novel coronavirus, which besides its health implications is set to inflict enormous economic damage and ferociously tests the EU's resolve to overcome future economic challenges collectively. But did the EU really learn from its mistakes in the previous financial crisis? Have the ruptures within the EMU that were so viciously exposed in 2010 been repaired?

It all started on the 7th of February 1992, a date of historical significance for European integration as the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty made the EMU that we know today a reality. For the first time, monetary integration became possible when a group of 11 member states adopted the Euro as their common currency, effectively delegating national sovereignty over their monetary policies to the European level. A fixed exchange rate regime was established and the European Central Bank (ECB) became the competent body responsible for ensuring price stability in the Eurozone. However, for a common currency to function effectively, there needs to be some degree of assimilation between Eurozone economies and given the diverging macro-economic conditions in each member state this was a tremendous task from the get go.

In 1999, at the start of the EMU, there was a clear difference between the Northern European countries and the peripheral Southern European economies. Northern European countries were growing slowly or not at all, whereas the peripheral Southern European economies were growing rapidly, with wages and prices increasing. Consequently, inflation was close to zero in countries like Germany while prices and wages were rising more rapidly in countries like Spain. Nonetheless, despite these differences, the ECB could only implement a single monetary policy for the Eurozone, and it chose one that attempted to find a middle ground between the needs of Northern and Southern Eurozone members. For most of its period the ECB's main interest rate was around 3%. This meant that interest rates in the peripheral countries were very low compared to national inflation. These low interest rates gave households and other economic agents in peripheral countries incentives to borrow whereas stagnation in the North gave investors strong incentives to lend. This trend was amplified by the fact that differences in competitiveness enabled exporting economies to accumulate trade surpluses that were then reinvested in Southern peripheral economies. In essence, the advent of the euro, brought together European lenders such as Germany and European borrowers such as Spain by lowering the risk associated with lending to the Eurozone periphery. This was because replacing national currencies like the drachma with the euro, meant that there was no longer a risk that the peripheral countries' currencies would lose value due to the inflationary pressures.

At the same time, this influx of capital lowered the cost associated with the peripheral economies borrowing from the core. Numerous Austrian, Dutch, German, and French banks ended up lending vast amounts of money to governments, firms, and individuals in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Some of that money went to firms and individuals directly in the form of corporate borrowing or interbank lending; some went indirectly in the form of sovereign debts to finance government expenditures that otherwise would have to be paid for out of tax receipts. In the short run, these complementary forces appeared to be working well together; the euro served the interests of the export oriented core and of the debt and demand driven periphery. Simply put, Northern European surpluses were financing the Eurozone periphery's deficits. In addition, this dynamic was further exacerbated by the Euro's incomplete design where monetary authority was delegated to the European level but substantial economic policy still remained vested in national states. This includes fiscal policy and financial regulatory authority. The macroeconomic imbalance that resulted in large scale capital flows could have been reduced to an extent if governments had collaborated to counteract some of these trends with their fiscal policies. By imposing more restrictive fiscal policies, booming peripheral countries such as Spain could have restrained demand, which would have limited the size of the current account deficit and the inflow of foreign capital. Likewise, surplus countries such as Germany could have adopted more expansionary fiscal policies to stimulate domestic demand and restrain capital outflows to the South.

Additionally, financial regulations were fragmented throughout the Eurozone with central oversight still firmly in the hands of national regulators. This enabled banks and other financial institutions to exploit legislative loopholes and provide loans that were of high risk. This excessive lending was further encouraged by the assumption that if and when financial difficulties arose in one of the Eurozone member states, the others would be forced to bail them out. This assumption rested on the observation that European financial markets were closely interconnected which created substantial contagion risks and turned even small economies such as Greece into systemically important actors. In other words, a financial meltdown could threaten the stability of the entire Eurozone and would force other countries to respond. As a result, these expectations reduced the perception of risk associated with weaknesses in an individual Eurozone country's financial system. This led to a convergence of borrowing costs in the Eurozone as a whole, where for almost 10 years, governments and private borrowers in the Eurozone could borrow at interest rates roughly equal to those charged to borrowers in Germany. Ironically, the expectations of the financial markets run counter to the no bailout clause which was enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon as a prohibition to an intra-European transfer of resources and funds. This was a pressing point for the creditor countries since such a clause was seen as a solution to the moral hazard problem. The moral hazard problem was premised on the assumption that the bailout of an insolvent government would entice further risky behavior in the future since the government in question would not fully internalize the costs and would repeat the same mistakes as it could rely on others to bail it out.

In sum, the EMU resembled an extensive yet incomplete scheme of integration, where on the one hand it had an established central bank to conduct monetary policy but no analogous fiscal or regulatory making body. It is therefore not surprising that the EMU lacked the institutional backbone to adequately address an external economic shock. This became apparent when the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank in the US fueled uncertainty over the capacity of borrowers to repay their loans. For years, reckless lending by banks and financial institutions led to the creation of a credit bubble which eventually burst once it became clear that borrowers could no longer fulfill their financial obligations. When those northern European banks began to lose money on their US investments they began to worry about their exposure in countries such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Slowly but steadily the dominoes began to fall and a 'flight to quality' commenced where investors started to sell their risky assets in the Southern periphery and move their money to the relatively safer assets of the Northern economies. This 'sudden stop' was quite destructive since the southern periphery experienced a sharp increase in its borrowing costs which expanded the mountain of debt that was accumulated substantially. Cut off from cheap capital after half a decade of being treated as being nearly as riskless as Germany, countries that had become accustomed to capital inflows found themselves unable to support existing spending levels.

The main consequence of this 'sudden stop' was that financially vulnerable Eurozone countries were unable to mobilize by themselves the money needed to address domestic banking crises. This was of course worsened by the absence of any EMU institution in the initial stages of the crisis that could provide the needed liquidity, either through the ECB as a Lender of Last Resort or through a European liquidity fund. Eventually, the necessary institutional architecture was set up in the form of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and a banking union which was composed of a common regulatory framework and resolution mechanism. In addition, agreements were put in place that would theoretically prevent eurozone members from incurring large sovereign debts. These included the so called six-pack and two pack of new EU rules and the treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (more commonly known as the 'fiscal compact'). However, not all that glitters is gold and this metaphor is certainly true for this instance, where the institutional innovations that took place were marred by internal conflict among member states. Let's start, with the establishment of the ESM, an international financial institution set up by member states that helps euro countries in severe financial distress. In essence, the ESM resembles a form of debt mutualization or sharing of risk between eurozone countries since it can raise funds on the financial markets with the capital backing all euro area countries. The money that is borrowed at very favorable rates is then lent out to the countries in distress. Nevertheless, there were extensive discussions among member states on how fast and under what conditions a eurozone country was eligible to request ESM assistance.

This discussion point turned into a bitter conflict over how the burden of adjusting to accumulated debts and macroeconomic imbalances would be distributed. Surplus countries, home to most of the creditors, insisted that deficit countries impose severe austerity measures to service the debts as contracted, or as close to the original sum as possible. Deficit countries insisted instead on less stringent austerity policies and more extensive relief and debt restructuring. Sadly, the power asymmetry between surplus and deficit countries, means that deficit countries have no choice but to adjust, whereas the latter is under no such pressure. Surplus countries therefore often succeed in shifting a disproportionate part of the adjustment burden onto deficit states. This is the injustice behind many of the austerity programmes that the Southern peripheral economies were forced to follow. This is because creditors and debtors are two sides of the same coin, since excess savings in the Northern European core fueled a spending spree in the Southern periphery that was beneficial for both in the short run. To better understand this premise, it is important to consider the role of Germany since the phenomenon of 'excess savings' is most prevalent in its own domestic economy.

After years of rigorous austerity and driving down wages in the unification phase, Germany was able to restore its international competitiveness. However, this comparative advantage was further boosted by the presence of a 'dual economy' where there was a clear split between an exporting sector that was characterized by high productivity levels and wages and a weaker domestic sector that was marked by lower levels of productivity and wages. This in combination with traditionally low levels of investment in the domestic economy exerted negative pressure on consumption and imports. Think about it for a second, lower levels of consumption result in higher savings (since everything not consumed theoretically results in higher savings) which in turn is reinvested in the Southern periphery. Why, you may ask, is the money not invested in the German economy? The reason is that lending it out for domestic economic activities would inevitably lead to an increase in prices which could hurt its exports. Thus, every excess euro saved by Germany must be borrowed by someone else; and that someone is predominantly the rest of the eurozone, especially the Southern periphery. In a broader sense, this explanation can also be extended to other export economies in the Eurozone but given Germany's relative size and influence, it is systemically the most important actor. It is therefore paradoxical, that when Northern European policy makers decry accumulation of debt in the periphery, they criticize an activity for which they bear a great deal of direct responsibility

This claim does not dismiss the point that Southern peripheral economies were in need of reform but rather that the pain of this adjustment would have been alleviated to a degree by debt restructuring. At the initial stages of the crisis, creditor countries were adamant in insisting that all loans would be paid back in order to prevent their constituencies from perceiving this action as a 'wealth tax' from the North to the South. This was something that was also explicitly outlawed in the no bailout clause in the Treaty of Lisbon. But how viable is this rhetoric? Austerity imposed under these loans shrinks national income as cuts in welfare payments such as pensions and unemployment benefits are usually the first measures to be implemented. Households end up with less disposable income and a deflationary spiral is initiated. This trend actually runs counter to the servicing of debts since GDP decreases as a result of austerity while debt obligations remain unchanged.

A middle ground that would address the need for reform in the Southern peripheral economy while at the same time reduce the pain of this adjustment was never really discussed at this point. Instead framing the crisis as one of 'excess spending' or 'fiscal irresponsibility' became the dominant narrative throughout this period. This was heavily reflected in the new EU rules that attempt to constrain fiscal spending in Eurozone states. The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance as well as the six pack rules focus on imposing binding rules on sovereign deficits. These include limiting debt to 60 percent of GDP, observed deficits to 3 percent of GDP and structural deficits to 0.5 percent of GDP. Once again, this narrow focus on sovereign debts tends to overlook the systemic imbalances that were present in the Eurozone. The crisis that followed was not limited to individual country cases per se but was rather systemic in nature. While Greece became the epithet of 'fiscal irresponsibility' during the crisis, we must not forget that countries like Ireland and Spain were heavily indebted in the private sector. Therefore, to construct the crisis as one of 'excess spending' effectively neglects the systemic nature of the problem and masks the massive capital inflows that were the main drivers of these financial instabilities. Furthermore, this approach downplays the importance of 'excess savings' and its contribution to generating the massive capital outflows that were absorbed by the Eurozone periphery.

In fact, there is a recurring theme that can be observed throughout this crisis period which is mainly a tendency by the creditor countries to disregard the systemic nature of the problem and instead focus on attributing individual responsibility to member states. There is a clear reluctance to share the burden of adjustment among Eurozone states and to accept the EMU for what it really is. An incomplete economic governance structure of nineteen heterogenous economies that lacks the political will to share the costs of maintaining a common currency. Even the banking union which has been heralded as a step closer towards integration is marked by this reluctance. The banking union consists of a new array of institutions that provide general oversight for European banks, insurance companies and financial markets. Specific responsibility for supervising

European financial institutions was delegated to the ECB and a common rule book on responsible bank conduct was established. Most importantly, the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) was established with the goal to recapitalize banks with liquidity problems. However, even this ambitious step is overshadowed by the fact that resources would be levied from the banks themselves (rather than from governments) and the process of recapitalization would need to be authorized by an intergovernmental agreement, which would provide creditor states with significant powers.

Taking all of the above into consideration, one important question remains unanswered, how did the euro manage to remain alive as a currency during this period of existential crisis? This question becomes even more pertinent if one considers that the political disagreement among Eurozone countries led to a delayed and slow response that was unable to calm down the financial markets. Every time a new solution was proposed it was always a step too late and one that represented the lowest common denominator among eurozone states. Surprisingly, it was the stern determination of the ECB that kept the euro afloat and provided Eurozone states the courtesy to agree to disagree. At the peak of the crisis in 2012, speculative forces began to worry about their exposure in Italian and Spanish assets. This was particularly troublesome because the Italian and Spanish economy is much larger in size than the relatively smaller economies of Greece, Portugal and Ireland that were hit at the initial stages of the crisis. In simple terms, a default of a Spanish or Italian bank threatened to deliver the definitive blow to the entire house of cards. This is because a capital flight away from the Southern periphery and into the North European core, essentially breaks the ECB's monetary transmission mechanism. When more capital enters into the North European economies their real interests fall while the exit of capital out of the Southern periphery causes real interest rates to increase. Monetary policy cannot be conducted in this context because when the ECB decides to lower the interest rate to stimulate investment, this action is heavily skewed in favour of the North European core where interest rates are already falling.

This led to a landmark announcement by the head of the ECB Mario Draghi who promised to do whatever it takes to keep the euro alive. This boiled down to a promise to buy 'unlimited' amounts of distressed-country sovereign debt in order to preserve the functioning of the monetary-transmission mechanism. By implication, he reassured international investors that there was a floor below which the value of their sovereign-debt holdings would not fall. It convinced investors to buy Italian and Spanish sovereign debt rather than to sell it. Thankfully, the most acute phases of the crisis were now over. What followed soon after was an unprecedented level of monetary activism where the ECB launched its large scale quantitative easing programme also known as the 'big bazooka'. This programme was designed to speed up the recovery process of the euro area countries that were most affected by the crisis and contained controversial elements such as accepting 'bad' debt as collateral. In a way, this was an implicit form of 'debt mutualization', a word that has sparked considerable controversy among member states.

The tale of the Eurozone crisis is important for the present day as it highlights the euro's vulnerabilities and gives us an accurate account of the internal strife that has stained the EMU ever since its creation. Today, the European economies are facing an invisible enemy in the form of COVID-19 which has put to a grinding halt all forms of economic activity. As governments moved their populations into lockdown, the economy was at a standstill and businesses faced the dawning reality of declining revenues but unchanged costs such as wages and rents. This new reality leads to extraordinary government intervention in the economy with governments issuing debt on a massive scale in order to keep businesses afloat. However, these sort of interventions cannot be realized by all Eurozone economies, with Southern peripheral economies such as Spain or Italy not having enough fiscal space to finance such an operation. As investors began to lose confidence in Italy's or Spain's ability to fend off the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, they started to sell their assets and move their money to the relatively safer assets in the Northern core. If this unravelling dynamic sounds somewhat familiar it is because it contains all the features of a 'sudden stop', this is an unnerving observation since it threatens to test the EMU's resilience once again. What makes it even more alarming, is that politicians can no longer afford to agree to disagree and rely on the ECB's response to keep the euro together.

On the 5th May of 2020, the ECB's quantitative easing bazooka was rendered as a violation of its mandate in a verdict by the German constitutional court. The German court was responding to a complaint filed in 2015, the year in which the ECB started its large scale quantitative easing programme. During its deliberations, it referred the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in order to seek guidance on whether the ECB exceeded its mandate by launching this programme. The main argument behind this claim rested on the fact that the ECB's decision to buy sovereign debt from distressed eurozone economies constituted a form of monetary financing. The ECB's sole task was to pursue price stability in the Eurozone which implied a formal distinction between monetary policy and sovereign finances. By purchasing large amounts of sovereign debt, keeping that debt to maturity and reinvesting the original sum of money into further debt, the ECB was indirectly supporting the debt sustainability of the Southern Periphery. This action encroaches upon the principle of individual accountability which was so strongly advocated for by the creditor countries. Although the ECJs opinion rendered the ECB's decision as lawful in 2018, the German constitutional court held that the ruling was 'incomprehensible' and could not be applied in German law.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that this decision alone is not sufficient to stop the ECB's action but it does leave the German leadership with a terrible conundrum. Germany must step up its efforts to find a viable political arrangement that can keep the euro intact or face the consequences of complete disintegration. It truly is a break or make moment for the euro. In a way, the ECB was never the appropriate steward in navigating such a politically sensitive landscape, it remains a technocratic institution that is removed from the realm of democratic deliberation. However, it was the ECB's resolute response that kept the euro from the brink of collapse and was able to fill in the leadership void that characterized the half-hearted response of Eurozone states. It was in this difficult context, that French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel came together on a proposal for a European Recovery Fund. On 18 May, the French and German governments published a joint proposal to allow the European Commission to borrow money against an expanded European budget to direct expenditure of €500bn over the three years starting in January 2021. This was later surpassed by the European Commission's proposal 'Next Generation EU' which added €250bn in loans on top of the €500bn in new spending. The much needed German leadership that was largely absent in the previous Eurozone crisis had finally emerged.

The EU summit on the 17th to 21st July is perhaps a momentous occasion that has changed the trajectory of the EMU in significant ways. The European's Commission's proposal was placed at the centre of the discussions and the heads of state concentrated their efforts in establishing a recovery fund. Once more, the old schisms between North and South resurfaced as the governments of some of the smaller northern European states were less enthusiastic about the commission’s proposal. They worried that an expanded budget would create transfers across countries, and reduce incentives for the governments of Italy and Spain to undertake necessary reforms. In these concerns, the old debates about mutual debt continued to resonate. After days of tough negotiations and a historically long summit, a compromise was reached. The new recovery fund is now centred on a €390bn programme of grants, a significantly smaller sum than the €500bn package originally proposed by Berlin and Paris in May. However, for the first time since its inception, the European Commission will collectively borrow large sums on the capital markets using the creditworthiness of the economically stronger members to lend and grant money to the weaker ones. It represents a move of tremendous importance and one that breaks the taboo of ‘debt mutualization’ that has so long encapsulated any debate on the euro.

Nonetheless let’s not get ahead of ourselves, as part of the compromise a so called break mechanism was agreed upon that allows any member state to object to another's spending plans when using loans or grants from the recovery fund. This could spell future trouble and lead to a series of inevitable disputes over the actual working of the fund and disbursement. Therefore, real political maturity and solidarity will only be truly tested when the gigantic increases in budget deficits as a result of COVID-19 will once again return to the forefront of the debate.

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## The Uncertain Future of European Defence

*By Philippe Lefevre*

The year is 2008 and the markets are crashing. Amidst a wave of layoffs and financial crises governments, in their earnest of austerity, are cutting projects and budgets like there could be no tomorrow. Indeed, that very thought drives their actions. They look to their ministries and their expenditure and many face the wrath of the bureaucrats desperate to lower the public debt. One ministry especially affected in Europe is that of defence. Almost 11% of Europe's entire defence budget is cut owing to a crisis that during its height, the second quarter of 2008, the EU's GDP dropped by 0.1%. The year is also 2020, and the GDP is expected to shrink by 8.3% and only grow back 5.8% in the next year.

Looking back to 2008 once again, for European defence times were simpler. Whilst an invasion into Georgia shocked and awed Europe, neither the European Union nor NATO (but the OSCE) truly acted as if it were an existential threat to Europe. China was happy playing its strong role as the workshop of the world, and neither an umbrella nor leaf blower has been raised in protest in Hong Kong. The United States was booting out an extremely unpopular president and the names Barack Obama and Joe Biden were heard across 28 of the 50 states and rather favourably abroad too. If there was one thing you would expect to remain the same into 2020, I'm certain it wasn't Joe Biden's name still being around.

What these comparisons highlight is twofold. Firstly, it shows that the pressure European defence is facing is far in excess of what it faced in its last "crisis". The strain that NATO, the EU, and the OSCE all face in leadership, political wrangling, and sheer money, would leave most cynics and betting men exuberant. However, the second item throws the first for a loop, and that is the positivity of these civil and defence institutions in the face of this crisis and the lack of any substantial expectation of any of these institutions disappearing. So, what is happening here? How is there such uncertainty in European defence but still such support and resilience? The answer lies in those 12 years since 2008, and the positive and strong role European defence has played since, and especially during this pandemic.

Let us assume the cynics for a moment and discuss the main pressures European Defence is under right now, starting with the lack of real communication between the main institutions involved in managing security. As soon as the going got tough, all talk of a European approach went out of the window. Covid-19 became as quickly a local problem as international solutions were being discussed. This underscores the difficulties European defence has too. NATO-EU dialogue existed for these types of civil-military crises, even EU Civil-military committees and organisations existed to manage these, yet they were left inactive as politicians bowed to the immediate pressure of their local communities. Whilst understandable, it shows how communication between security and defence institutions is very lacklustre and constitutes one of the key bottlenecks that is currently faced. This is not even to start on the lack of a coordinated vision for European defence, but that is rather the lack of a driver rather than the application of new pressure.

Next, let's follow the money, or rather, the lack of it. Whilst European defence now has more money than ever, with more countries signing up to the NATO 2%, the European Defence Fund now "existing", and projects in the works, it's not hard to see all of this going swiftly and effectively out of the window like a badly judged Czech major. The money is tough to come by for any major project right now, and whilst 7 billion euros for the European Defence Fund sounds impressive, spread over 7 years, across 28 member states, with maintenance taking up a lot of this money, and suddenly you begin to realise that this "investment" is more akin to something a long-lost friend tries to sell you on Facebook.

Lastly let's address the new stress and weakening support from traditional allies. Whilst Trump's broadside on Europe and European defence is worrying, the soft tone of the alternative shouldn't lead people to imagine a wonderful return to force for Atlanticism. The US is fundamentally changing its role in the world, and if left in a vacuum perhaps it could return to its position as a protector and supporter of European diplomacy. However, international relations don't exist in a vacuum, and China's rise helps to tip the balance towards a more uncertain existence for Atlanticism, and thus, traditional support for European defence. To go at it alone isn't necessarily an existential threat for European defence, but it is a challenge and a stress it can hardly afford. Combine this with a resurgent Russia managing its "isolation" from the west in surprisingly comfortable style, and you start to see the true issues at hand.

However, what if this pressure and a few original bonuses, constitute exactly why we should be positive? It is no secret that the military love bogeymen. It's fuelled conflict, tanks, and suspiciously made stock market rises for generations and Russia's return to a threat to Europe could be seen as a positive step for Europe. Some countries are not as involved, Turkey, France, Austria, all of which hold more positive views of Russia, not to mention the current US administration's penchant for Putin. Yet the Russian invasion of Crimea and the current Russo-Ukrainian War has helped focus European defence in a remarkably salient way. We see new initiatives striking up from never, and once again these do not happen in a vacuum. The Lublin initiative from Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania highlights this, as does PESCO's slow but steady start into an actual form of European defence cooperation. In this sense, whilst the money might not be there, the need is. Furthermore, this holds great possibilities for a possible retargeting towards other threats. China, whilst still a benefactor to most of Europe, is developing a taste for expansionism, and the existence of one threat to Europe allows European allies to more easily add another on.

To clarify this point further, European defence is being taken more seriously than ever before. Notwithstanding the new threat to the East, the threat from inside is being tackled as much as possible. Brexit, to my understanding, will aid and abet this. With the strong possibility of losing a key military ally, continental Europe is realising its own strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities in a way that hasn't really been looked at or taken seriously before. Britain, always keen to throw its weight around will work with a Europe that takes its defence seriously. This is a key light as to why the uncertainty isn't so certain after all, because defence has found its niche in the European system.

Finally turning to the current pandemic, it has been a huge boon to European defence, as the military have (nationally) been incredibly effective at emphasising their importance in civilian crises. From building hospitals, to dealing with logistics, the ties between civil and military security have never been stronger, allowing many Europeans to recognise the value of defence even when it's not holding a gun. In this way, security itself has been redeveloped, and as Jens Stoltenberg mentioned, organisations such as NATO have been very effective at stopping the health crisis becoming a security one.

With this in mind, what will be the uncertain future of European defence? Let us do some old-fashioned and ill-advised crystal-ball gazing. Firstly, there will be casualties. Hopefully not physical, but institutional. The battles fought over organisations such as the OSCE, with some of the key leadership being vetoed by various countries, EU defence projects, and research and development will lead to key losses in important fields. This is important to notice early and brace for their demise, with the hope of salvaging what we can.

Next will be the hardening of the battle lines in Europe. Not literally, but figuratively, Europe will begin to set some red lines as compromises form into agreement on some ideas. For now, we cannot say what those will be. Although the turning point in this author's opinion has passed, the dust has not yet settled. Many in Europe will probably be waiting for the US election in November to decide, but a single escalation in a single area of interest will likely set these battle lines for the significant future.

Lastly, is a complete overhaul of what European security and defence even means. Let us remember, we have been talking about "hybrid" threats for so long that the term itself has been hybridized. Fake news, cyber-security, misinformation, civil security, all constitute as much, if not more, of what security means than handling a gun. Leading from this too, for Europe tariffs will begin to mean as much as small missile strikes, as trade also becomes front and centre of security applications. Not that real bullets will be ignored once the theoretical battle plans are drawn.

In essence, the certainty lies in European defences continued survival. It is too essential and too potent to dismantle especially in the current threats we face. Yet its direction lays just as uncertain. What we need now is to plan, and plan, and then do a little more planning. Why? Well, driven by the words of one of the creators of European defence, Dwight D. Eisenhower: ''In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless but planning is indispensable."

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## Standing by European Companies: A Pandemic Paradigm Shift in EU FDI Screening?

*By Mareike Hoffmann*

In an era of globalization and worldwide supply chains, the question of how to address foreign direct investment (FDI) in companies within one's territory is familiar.[i] As a response to some countries developing frameworks to screen and restrict incoming FDI, the EU developed its own FDI screening framework through Regulation (EU) 2019/452.[ii] The COVID-19 pandemic, however, made governments acutely aware of the need to protect their critical infrastructure from hostile takeovers. On 25 March 2020, the European Commission (EC) reacted to these concerns through the publication of a guideline on the FDI Screening Regulation. The guideline stresses that 'today more than ever, the EU's openness to foreign investment needs to be balanced by appropriate screening tools.'[iii]

Commentators bemoan this guidance as a 'pandemic paradigm shift', a 'bold step' through which the EC takes over an area of competence of the EU Member States. These criticisms, however, understate the previous development of investment protection in the EU. While the Covid-19 pandemic requires protective action due to the structure of European companies, the EC merely continues a path, which started long before the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has a two-fold impact on the global economy. On the one hand, governmental lock down orders force companies to halt their business and significant parts of the global economy came to a standstill. As a result, the IMF predicts that the 'Great Lockdown' will surpass the 2008 global financial crisis as the worst crisis since the Great Depression. Although the growth forecast must be taken with a grain of salt due to the 'extreme uncertainty', the report estimates the eurozone's GDP to fall by 7.5% in 2020.[iv] On the other hand, the disruption of global supply chains redirected the focus to ensuring the domestic production of protective and medical equipment resp. medicines. India and China, the main producers of active pharmaceutical ingredients and finished medicines, struggle with Covid-19 and a slow-down in production. Consequently, the Indian government, for example, restricted the export of pharmaceutical products which, in turn, causes a shortage in importing countries.[v]

These developments necessitated a response from European policy makers. To avoid shortages in the short run, the Commission publicized a guideline focusing on demand optimization and rational supply.[vi] The focus of the Commission, however, was arguably on the protection of domestic EU companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the 'backbone of the European economy', constituting 99.8% of all enterprises and accounting for 66% of all employment.[vii] As SMEs have limited technical and financial resources, resulting in less profitability and liquidity, they are prone to struggle more with external shocks, like the pandemic, than larger companies.[viii] According to a 2020 OECD report, 50-70% of SMEs already experience negative effects.[ix] Recognizing this vulnerability, European policy makers prioritize the protection of SMEs in their economic response to the pandemic.[x] The issuance of subsidies to support the liquidity of companies by national governments is complemented by the publication of a guideline on the screening of FDI to 'avoid harmful impact on the EU's capacity to cover the health needs of its citizens.'[xi] The guideline outlines the potential implications from the Covid-19 pandemic on security and public order. The Commission further encourages the EU Member States to make use of their existing FDI screening frameworks resp. to introduce new mechanisms. In addition, the

EC points to the possibility of states to retain 'special rights in certain undertakings ("golden shares")'.[xii]

The past decade saw a growing involvement of the EU in the regulation of investment matters. While the EU has been competent to regulate aspects of investment relating to the internal market for a long time through the freedom of establishment and the free movement of capital, the Treaty of Lisbon introduced Art. 207 TFEU which transfers the EU the competence to regulate the common commercial policy and, thereby, FDI. As a consequence, the EU increasingly regulates more aspects of investments, including i.a. intra-EU bilateral investment treaties (BITs), and a framework for FDI screening mechanisms. The latter was introduced by Regulation (EU) 2019/452 to create a level playing field with third countries and to reconcile the need for FDI for economic growth and the need to protect key technologies.[xiii] Regulation 2019/452 establishes a framework for the screening by Member States of FDI flowing into their territory on the grounds of security and public order. Considering the sensitivity of these grounds for the Member States, the framework constitutes a possibility for Member States to pursue rather than an obligation.[xiv]

Nevertheless, some observers title the newly published guidance as a sign of a 'paradigm shift' of the EC with regard to FDI control. They contrast the EC's guidance with the earlier Member-States-centric direction. Modrall argues that the existence of the guidance demonstrates the EC's intent to take a leading role in setting FDI policy, considering Regulation 2019/452's date of application is in October 2020.[xv] He further reinforces this argument by noting a change in stance by the EC which is no longer neutral but recommends Member States to adopt an FDI screening mechanism.[xvi] Sachs and Schmidt feel a paradigm shift towards stricter FDI regimes in the entirety of the EU to prevent the sell-off of critical assets.[xvii]

Despite the undeniable increase in action, the EC's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic cannot yet be titled a paradigm shift. Rather, it continues in the general direction of Regulation 2019/452. Firstly, the guidance and Regulation 2019/452 followed requests by the EU Member States. Regulation 2019/452 was adopted after a joint letter by the French, Italian and German governments reignited the debate on the increasing state-led strategic direct investments of third-country companies in European key technologies.[xviii] Similarly, the guidance on FDI screening during the Covid-19 pandemic followed a letter to European Council President on 25 March 2020 by Heads of State of Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain asking to ensure 'essential value chains can fully function within the EU, and that no strategic assets fall prey of hostile takeovers during the phase of the economic difficulties.'[xix] Secondly, the guidance does not change the fact that, while Regulation 2019/452 is binding, it is not compulsory for Member States to introduce a FDI screening mechanism. The EC might not have chosen a neutral language in the guidance, but the guidance remains a recommendation which expresses the EC's opinion on the best course of action during the pandemic. Thirdly, the guidance follows the same overall goal as Regulation 2019/452 by creating legal certainty for Member States regarding their margin of discretion concerning their actions and the compatibility thereof with EU law. Thereby, the guidance does not even diminish the wide margin of discretion afforded to the Member States by the Regulation when they decide to set up an FDI screening mechanism. Instead, it offers interpretations of Regulation 2019/452's terminology in relation to the pandemic rather than imposing certain way of actions.

In summary, this contribution shows that, while the structure of European companies required protection and necessitated action in the realm of FDI, the Commission's guidance cannot be seen as a paradigm shift yet. Instead, it addresses the concerns of Member States within its previous lines of action and stays within Regulation 2019/452 and its competence under art. 207 TFEU. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how the Commission further comports itself during the cooperation procedure under Regulation 2019/452. As the EC increasingly involves itself with investment protection, it would not be surprising if it chose to actively use its options under Regulation 452/2019. Up until now, the EC does nothing but enable Member States to fulfill promises such as given by Peter Altmaier, Germany's economy minister, stating that 'all those people in hedge funds and elsewhere who are looking forward to acquiring one or the other [German firms] on the cheap — make no mistake, we are determined to stand by our companies.'[xx]

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## EU-Africa Post-Covid Relations - Less Money, More Delay and New Opportunities

*By Anna Książczak*

### Introduction

Just before the pandemic, in March 2020 the European Commission presented its communication on a brand-new EU-Africa strategy, outlining its priorities for how future EU-Africa relations should look like. A key point was to move the relations from a development aid-centred approach to a more investment focused approach. In addition, the strategy highlighted some key areas of focus, from green transition to peace and migration (Lebovich, 2020).

Now, this strategy seems to be somewhat outdated. Impacted by the pandemic, EU's attention turned inward in dealing with the health and economic consequences. And although the pandemic impacted Europe strongly, it will most likely hit Africa harder. The decline of demand and commodity prices is already felt by African exporters and lockdowns will impact Africa's already constrained fiscal capacities. In some cases, 85% of Africans working in the informal sector have lost their jobs and revenue streams, while families dependent on remittances saw their incomes shrink (Chergui, 2020). Yet, this dire economic forecast also means there is a role for the EU, Africa's largest trading partner and source of investment and development aid. The EU-Africa 'partnership of equals' that many leaders promote is now more needed than ever. How will Covid-19 shape the future EU-Africa relations?

This article looks at four areas of EU-Africa cooperation from the perspective of the EU and analyses the ways in which strategic vision, trade, aid, and security might be impacted by the pandemic. While the relations develop in the context of the geopolitical rivalry with China, this article believes they are worth examining in their own right. It concludes by what the future relations might look like: strained by delays and lack of funding, yet strengthened by new opportunities.

### Strategy and diplomacy

It is no secret that the EU struggles to have a strategic vision. Due to different priorities among the member states, key strategic documents such the EU Global Security Strategy of 2016 resemble a list of all regions and issues in the world, rather than a focused expression of a strategic vision. Despite this general trend, the new Commission has so far managed to prioritize EU-Africa relations and gather momentum in favour of moving the relations forward. For her first travel outside the EU, President Von der Leyen chose Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia and the seat of African Union. In this trip, she stressed again the ambition to create a 'partnership of equals' with the African nations (Medinilla & Teevan, 2020). Also the above mentioned EU-Africa strategy from March 2020 conveys an expression of priorities, containing 10 proposed actions to be implemented (Byiers, 2020). Although it lacks specificity as almost all EU foreign policy strategies do, it at least managed to keep EU-Africa relations on the top of the agenda.

However, this spotlight did not last long as soon the European health policy, economic recovery and the actions of China started to occupy the agenda. An opportunity to gain at least some of the attention back is the upcoming EU-Africa summit. This meeting of EU and African leaders usually takes place every three or four years. At the time of writing, the summit is still scheduled for

October 2020, although it is not certain yet in which form it will take place. The summit will be an opportunity to follow up on priorities identified by the Commission. From the African side, the representatives highlight that the priorities are clear, but the way to achieve them might be more complicated (Sherriff et al, 2020). In any case, the pandemic will likely impact the agenda of the summit, as it brought to the fore topics such health systems, debt restructuring or diversification of supply chains.

Another important moment in EU-Africa relations will be defined by the Post-Cotonou Agreement negotiations. The Cotonou Agreement, a political cooperation and trade deal between the EU and a group of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, expired last year. Already then it was clear the negotiations would be delayed by the EU's lack of a common position on migration and by the unclear role of the African Union in the EU-ACP deal. Covid-19 is behind additional delay on the Post-Cotonou negotiations as meetings had to be moved online and only recently were resumed on the highest level (Sherriff et al., 2020). On the 12th of July, the negotiators announced that they are closing in on an agreement. Nevertheless, contentious issues remain, especially in the area of migration (Fox, 2020). In sum, the exact shape of future EU-Africa relations remains in the air, as negotiations on many issues are ongoing. Meanwhile, it is already clear that the pandemic brought a shift in agenda, together with additional delays and uncertainty.

**Trade**

As of now, EU-Africa trade is largely unbalanced. While 70% of what the EU exports to Africa are manufacturing goods, 66% of what Africa exports to the EU are primary goods, mainly in the form of raw materials (Eurostat, 2020). An additional source of unbalance is the trade governance structure, consisting of a patchwork including five regional economic partnership agreements with Sub-Saharan states and bilateral free trade agreements with North African states, some of them still in negotiation. In effect, each region received a different offer from the EU, and countries with overlapping membership were forced to choose in between the regions. Such divisions risk undermining the process of economic integration in Africa (Sicurelli, 2010, p. 88).

Now, the situation might change. Last year marked the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), a pan-African trade deal. AU officials indicated that the ACFTA should become functional in January 2021 after the July deadline was missed due to the pandemic. Although it is far from implementation, it is still an important step towards increasing intra-African trade. This could be a crucial response to the pandemic, due to the economic growth and job opportunities such a deal could provide. In the long-term, this process could lead to a continent-to-continent free trade agreement with the EU, eliminating the patchwork structure (Medinilla & Teevan, 2020).

The way the EU could support the implementation of ACFTA will be an important topic in the run up to the above-mentioned EU-Africa summit. So far, the EU expressed its support for the deal, however, it stressed that the economic partnership agreements with the individual regions should serve as the building blocks (Fox, 2018), again appearing to promote compartmentalisation of the African market. It is exactly positions like these that, together with the Common Agricultural Policy, undermine the attractiveness of the European market for Africa.

Yet, the pandemic might also highlight opportunities that have so far been overlooked. The pandemic showed the dependency of European value chains on Chinese production and its strategic risks. Increasingly, there is an interest in European countries to relocate some parts of value chains, which might offer an opportunity to support African industrial production. Such a step would however require filling a $100 billion yearly gap in infrastructure financing. Together with the support of the implementation of ACFTA, this could be a role for the European direct investment in the post-pandemic era (Lebovich, 2020).

**Aid**

Besides each member allocating its own development aid, the EU member states have decided to also allocate funds to be managed and distributed through the EU institutions, with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank as the main actors. Together with its member states, it is the largest aid donor in the world, accounting for more than 50% of global assistance (EC, 2020). The EU has a wide array of development instruments at its disposal, ranging from short-term relief to more long-term development projects. Given the significance of the EU as a development actor, it is expected to assist with urgent needs and slowing the spread of the virus as well as the long term social and economic consequences of the crisis (Jones et al., 2020).

When it comes to the immediate response, the Commission reacted rather swiftly. It frontloaded (made available earlier) some of the development funds and relaxed the use of bilateral assistance to deal with immediate needs (Cohen-Hadria, 2020) It also mobilised resources through a 'Team Europe' initiative, joining resources of the EU, its member states and financial institutions (EEAS, 2020). Yet, for the most part, rather than committing new resources, this aid was rechanneled to the detriment of other development projects (Bilal and Di Commo, 2020).

In addition, this mobilisation of resources did not seem to carry weight in planning EU development aid in the long-term as shown by the recent EU summit on the budget negotiations. In the end, €70.8 billion was allocated to the main development aid tool, a 10% reduction from what was proposed by the Commission in May 2018. Development goals also did not fare well in the "Next Generation EU", an additional €750 coronavirus recovery fund. In the context of the battle with the frugal states, the €10.5 billion for development funding and €5 billion for humanitarian aid proposed by the Commission did not make it to the final proposal (Chadwick, 2020). Although the negotiations are not over and the European Parliament will want to amend the budget as well, this is nevertheless a worrying trend for the EU development ambitions.

**Security**

Peace and security on the continent remain to be important to the EU. It supports financially the activities of the AU on the continent through the African Peace Facility but is also looking to assert itself as an independent security actor. In particular, the EU faces domestic pressures to focus on containing issues such as violent extremism and irregular migration. At times, pursuing such interests clashes with the preferences of the African Union and contains little local ownership (Medinilla & Teevan, 2020). Alongside the short to medium term effort, the EU also pursues concepts such as 'structural stability' and 'resilience', integrating security and development goals to address what it understands as the roots of conflict (Sicurelli, 2010, p. 44). Both short term and long-term efforts will be important in addressing security issues in post-Covid Africa.

Overall, the impact of the pandemic on security in Africa is not yet fully known. In the first months of the pandemic, the level of social and political conflict and crime actually decreased as lockdown froze the conflicts. At the same time, the underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities intensified, making it likely that more conflict will be observed when the measures ease (Gounden, 2020).

Other data suggests that there has already been an upsurge in terrorist and non-state armed groups attacks. The situation is further complicated by withdrawals of international peacekeepers as well as suspension of bilateral military training programmes, which threatens the capacity of state security forces to carry out counterterrorism measures (Desmidt and Neat, 2020).

The EU security role in Africa has impacted some of the same trends seen above. European officials report that while in February conflict mediation in Libya was high on the agenda in Berlin and Brussels, the conflict is no longer prioritised. A long-planned summit between the EU and Sahel countries on joint counterterrorism effort had to be held online (International Crisis Group, 2020). To act as an effective conflict management actor in the Post-Covid era, the EU needs to get security in Africa back on the high-level agenda and intensify its peacebuilding efforts. At the same time, it will need to address structural vulnerabilities aggravated by Covid-19. Without a doubt, this will be a difficult task without adequate funding at hand.

**Conclusion**

At first sight, reviewing EU-Africa relations in the above-mentioned areas shows a rather grim picture. There are delays in negotiations, diplomatic meetings and implementation of projects. Previous to the pandemic, the Commission managed to keep EU-Africa relations high on the agenda but as visible in the low profile of EU development aid funding in the new EU budget, the EU's attention turned inward. Meanwhile, the economic and security situation in Africa has already worsened and is likely to deteriorate further. Without the adequate attention and resources, it will be difficult to address the increased vulnerabilities on the continent.

Yet, the future months will offer an opportunity to refocus the attention again, both in the Post-Cotonou negotiations and the EU-Africa summit. This will also be a moment to capitalise on the newly relevant topics such as health systems in Africa or the relocation of global value chains. There is an opportunity to move beyond the unbalanced trade relations and benefit from industrial development and expanded internal market in Africa. The next couple of months will tell whether African and European leaders will be able to overcome the additional hardships, make use of the opportunities presented and manage to construct a viable partnership for the future.

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## A Respirator of Solidarity and Ambition or the Union's last breath? Covid-19 as a crossroads for an EU in desperate need of soul-searching

*By Teun Janssen*

*''Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.''*
*~ Jean Monet, 1978*

*''In many ways, Europe's motto has always been not only 'united in diversity' but also 'united in adversity.''*
*~ Ursula von der Leyen, 13 May 2020*

**Introduction**

For a complex, confusing and sometimes seemingly contradictory Union of 27 states which has faced an unprecedented wave of pressures in the past decade which have all but normalized the word ''crisis'' in the everyday European vocabulary, one would expect that after the Eurozone, Ukraine, Migration, Brexit and Transatlantic crises, a kind of popular fatigue with the project would have set in. The Covid-19 pandemic, the proverbial cherry on this disaster cake, should then have been the nail in the coffin to a slow, dysfunctional and declining organization which was founded on experiences people no longer have direct memories of.

In fact, as the most recent Eurobarometer surveys just before the pandemic struck show, popular support for the EU, at 68%, is at its highest since the fall of the Berlin Wall.[i] A record turnout of 51% during the 2019 European Parliament elections illustrate a growing public engagement with the project, perhaps more a reflection of demands for change than blind support.[ii] Several months into the pandemic itself, enthusiasm for Eurosceptic and Populist parties is at an all-time low in most member states and unprecedented integrative policies have been set in motion by decisionmakers with a renewed sense of legitimacy.[iii]

None of this is to claim that the EU has responded flawlessly, never mind strengthened itself, in response to the ongoing health crisis. The initial unilateral reactions and ongoing disputes over the way forward between states and political groups formed, and continued to form, as former President of the European Commission Jacques Delors described it, a ''mortal danger'' to the European Project. The current occupant of that title, Ursula von der Leyen, admitted that the EU ''faced the abyss'' at the beginning of the crisis amidst border closures and equipment export bans.[iv] Yet this very constant fear of a collapse of the Union, and it's associated link to the strong collective memory of the events of the Second World war upon which the Union was founded, with Auschwitz at its singularity, paradoxically forms a unique and powerful push-factor towards integrative policies and innovative, radical change which in quieter waters would have been virtually impossible. One can observe the link between the change of rhetoric since those early months in March as leaders started to compare the ongoing crisis as the greatest threat to the EU since the Second World War, and the associated political momentum towards common debt mutualization which ultimately culminated in the revolutionary plan of the 21st of July which has, with all its flaws and relativizations, been often described as the EU's ''Hamiltonian moment'' in its precedent for fiscal integration. No matter how it is framed from capital to capital, and with issues from rule of law conditionality to climate, digital and resilience spending concerns ongoing, Europe has in fact entered another domain traditionally associated with that of a state; issuing common debt and engaging in large scale economic interventionism.

With the historical European memory of what happens when painful but ultimately necessary cooperation makes way for national selfishness at heart, President Von der Leyen is right to say that Europe is perhaps as much ''United in Adversity'', or rather the threat of adversity, as it is ''United in Diversity''.[1] However, while this process may work surprisingly well for decisionmakers put against the test, it does little to solve, and perhaps aggravates the greatest problem the EU has faced in accelerating pace since the Treaty of Maastricht introduced Citizenship and a kind of political, more public Union in 1992; the issue of a sense of belonging to, transparency from, and a common position in the world by, the European Union for ordinary citizens. This small piece attempts to suggest some answers to those questions.

Firstly, the EU has an infamous issue with communication and public relations, a result of its own limited competences afforded to it by member states as much as by lack of a coherent framework. So before we dive into suggestions for how to seize the moment of the crisis as a way to bring Europe to its citizens, a quick summary of what was actually done in terms of health and economic policy in recent months is important.

Secondly, the Coronavirus crisis thus presents Europe with a unique, bottom-up, and perhaps final opportunity at constituting what Europe should mean for its inhabitants beyond just a common trading bloc in an increasingly turbulent world. Missing that moment would mean the return of resentment, populism, and a slow disintegration of the project. Tools are forged quickest and strongest while the crucible is hot, and some suggestions for how to craft them will follow, especially in the framework of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe.

**Bursting the Bubble: what has the EU done for Health and the Economy amidst Covid-19?**

**Health**

The effects of Covid-19 on human life are the most obvious and profound. What has the EU done to respond to the challenge to our healthcare (which remains, as is important, a shared, not exclusive competence of the union).

More than 50 billion euro in direct aid have been provided for initiatives such as RescEU , the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Emergency Support Instrument, which enable the joint procurement and stockpiling of medical equipment, the mobilizing of medical teams to assist the most vulnerable states and groups, including refugees, the providing of medical equipment and transferring of patients in cross-border regions and the scaling up of testing.

The Commission is also ramping up the production of personal protective equipment (PPE) on a massive scale in order to make the EU more autonomous in this crucial strategic sector. It published a common exit strategy including the coordination of testing, re-opening of economies and the internal market including so called ''green lanes'' for essential goods.  Hundreds of millions of euros have been made available for vaccine research and development, treatments, tests and medical systems through the Horizon 2020 program, including 120 million euro for the

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[1] For more on the link between the Collective Memory of the traumatic events of the 20th century, it's historical evolution into a unique European ''Politics of Regret'' and its mobilizing effect on political decision making, feel free to check out my MA thesis; Teun Janssen, *''A broken heart that beats: On the link between Collective Memory, Politics of Regret and Crisis Management in the European Union'', College of Europe,* June 26, 2020.

innovative German vaccine company CureVac after the United States attempted to acquire the firm to exclusively produce vaccines for the United States amidst outcry from the international community.

All of this has meant that a million of masks, ventilators and suits have been provided from all over the union to Italy, Spain and other countries badly hit; by late March French patients were being airlifted and treated in Germany, Romanian doctors were working on the frontlines in Bergamo, and mobile Portuguese testing units were saving lives in Spain. As a result, case numbers went down and the curve was flattened. We are now much better prepared for a potential second wave.

**Economy**

In early March, when the signs of a major upcoming Eurozone depression were showing, state aid restrictions and deficit limits under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) were frozen and the European Central Bank moved quickly by creating a 750-billion-euro Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program on the 18th of march to maintain liquidity through purchases of private and public securities.

After two weeks of intense discussions amongst the members of the Eurogroup, a 500 billion euro rescue package was agreed on the 9th of April, including 210 billion made available through the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) for states in need with limited conditionality, 200 billion for small and medium enterprises through the European Investment Bank and 100 billion through SURE; a new unemployment reinsurance scheme. The discussion then shifted from the immediate crisis management, towards that of recovery.

Eventually, by the end of May 2020, the EU Commission put forward its proposal for a recovery plan, which implied the creation of a new recovery instrument, the Next Generation EU (750 billion euros in addition to the 2021-2027 financial framework of 1.1 trillion euros)[v]. After Germany threw its weight behind the plan, seemingly reversing a long-standing tradition of European economic and financial conservatism and refuelling a renewed Franco-German motor, one of the longest European Council summits finally led to a toughly-negotiated but ambitious compromise on July 21st which put the EU on a path towards fiscal integration through the common issuing of large scale debt. Still, the pandemic has shown that even in times of unprecedented crisis, when European solidarity is the most needed, finding a consensus on a financial package to support and revive the economy is undermined by traditional political and economic divergences. There was a particularly evident opposition of the "Frugal Four", made up of Austria, Sweden, Denmark and led by the Netherlands, to the Franco-German proposed recovery plan on the issues of opting for grants or loans, and economic reform and rule of law conditionality to that aid.

The latter was especially relevant amidst the adoption of a controversial emergency law in Hungary over the pandemic and continued rule of law concerns in Poland. However, the final wording of the agreement from July 21st was vague enough to be interpreted as a victory for both sides of the argument and put the issue on ice for the European Council to "revert rapidly" to "introduce a regime", merely delaying this inevitable battleground of ideas.[vi] A recent commission decision to deny the request for grants by 6 Polish towns which had declared themselves as ''LGBTI free zones'', which the commission deemed as a violation of the EU's fundamental rights, sets a precedent and is a clear political signal that this debate is far from over and will continue to play out over the following months in the council and national parliaments.[vii]

Despite these eventual achievements in health and economic policy, they were thus marked by significant controversies and a slow initial reaction. Many have said that the slow EU crisis management mirrored the institutional and political shortcomings of the Union. It is in this particular context that many experts have called on the EU to reform in order to have a more pragmatic, reactive and results-oriented Union. What could be in store for its future relationship with member states, citizens, and as a global actor?

**Long-term prospects for the EU and a revived Conference on the Future of Europe**

If Europe is to finally throw its potentially large weight around on the international scene more effectively (and fill the gap in between the two extremes of China's collectivism and US individualism), a more "sovereign'' or autonomous Europe, something talked about for years and already expressed as a political priority by Macron back in 2017, would first have to get its act together internally and more clearly define what kind of actor it wants to be.[viii]

Ever since the failed Convention on the Future of Europe of 2005, Europe has been stuck in a period of a soul-searching freeze, while its institutional foundations have proven inadequate and the world around it has grown increasingly tense amidst a decade of crises: 2010-2020. While Russia and China's increased geopolitical activity, Brexit, the Eurozone and Migration crises had already kickstarted calls for such a moment of renewed self-definition, COVID-19 seems to have broken the ice.

Even before the crisis hit, the European Green Deal, the Digital Transition and the Conference on the Future of Europe had been signalled by the European Commission as three landmark initiatives to give direction to the EU. The latter was to have been held on May 9th – the 70th anniversary of the Schuman declaration, and involve citizens in an exercise of bottom-up discursive democracy to produce ideas for a reform of the EU's democratic foundations and to give it renewed confidence, legitimacy and attachment from citizens. The European Parliament, Commission and many member states including the new and powerful German Presidency of the Council (a crucial luck of timing) have already expressed the need for such a Conference in this autumn to accompany the economic and financial recovery phase of the coronavirus response.[ix]

This article recommends that such a conference becomes much more ambitious, bottom-up and touching upon a broader array of topics than planned before the pandemic hit. It should become the basis for a normative shift in how the EU works for its citizens and engages visibly with them and finally becomes a more authoritative international actor. In the spirit of Macron's *Grand Debat*, which was largely a symbolic event, the conference should organise large amounts of citizen forums, linking policy makers and citizens, and use digital tools more effectively.

Due to corona, a number of new priorities have emerged which should be included in the discussions. Firstly, amidst plenty of evidence to the underlying weaknesses of European health competences and industrial autonomy, from the aforementioned US attempt to buy CureVac, to Chinese and Russian disinformation warfare exploiting the EU's weak public relations profile through hyperbolic aid deliveries and media strategies, the EU needs to find a way to accommodate the benefits of global trade and multilateralism with selective protectionist policies. This should include some regained autonomy in the research and development, procurement and distribution of medical equipment, treatments and vaccines. This is part of a broader push for an industrial policy of "European Giants" which can compete with Chinese and US firms, but should remain aligned with a competition policy that also gives the EU international clout.

Secondly, while the European Green Deal has already been designated as an essential element in the recovery phase of the EU's response to the coronavirus, efforts should be accelerated to really put it at the heart of the longer-term economic identity of the EU in line with the goal for climate neutrality by 2050.[x] Citizens from Beijing through New Delhi and Paris have seen how clean the air can be if carbon intensive industry is phased out, even temporarily. Responding to COVID-19 should not just mean providing respirators to people, it should entrench a right to breathing clean air for ourselves and future generations. The Just Transition Fund and new proposals for creative tools such as a Carbon Border Adjustment (basically a tax on imported energy and products that are carbon-intensive) and an expanded European Emission Trading System (commercialising, so incentivising, decarbonisation for the private sector) will be crucial.

Thirdly, the crisis has illustrated both the disruptive effects of physical distancing and the remarkably flexible and diverse capability of digital platforms for professional, academic and social purposes. The EU no longer has an excuse to wait with significant research and development, investment and structural transformation towards a more digital society. The latter could also improve the effectiveness and equality of participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe as well. At the same time, digital autonomy could provide for greater security, including a secure 5G network and expanded anti-cyber warfare and disinformation capabilities, weaknesses which were so clearly a major problem in the past months.

Fourthly, on the topic of defence and security and the broader discussion of strategic autonomy, the coronavirus should not lead to a shift away from discussions about expanded EU defence capabilities just as fledging new institutions and programmes such as the EDA, EDF, PESCO and Military Mobility are starting to take root. Most proposals for the new Financial Framework of 2021-2027 include significant reductions to those programmes that are seen as less pressing than the health, economic and social effects of the crisis.[xi] To the contrary, all of them are tied together in security imperatives. At a time when medical aid, and treatment and vaccine research, procurement and distribution is employed as political leverage in a global "vaccine" or "solidarity" race, health should be seen as a real security issue (without losing sight of our multilateral principles). If Europe is to survive the coming period and emerge from it with greater strength that can back normative principles with credible deterrence, we should also expand our military capabilities and broaden strategic autonomy, including on medicines and moves towards defence integration.

All of these proposals should be included in the Conference on the Future of Europe and be not just reinforced, but subject to the input from citizens. All of them have an established legal basis for their potential operation, broadly encapsulated in the "Solidarity Clause" of article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Yet it might be required that treaty revision will have to take place, which while a "word which shall not be named" for many national leaders, might have become inevitable in this unique situation and in fact could provide a welcome reset of a European self-definition in an uncertain era.

**''Stuck in the Middle with EU'', claiming leadership of a new multilateral constellation**

For several years now, and especially since the election of Donald Trump in the United States, we have seen a withdrawal of the US from many multilateral arrangements such as the Paris Agreement or the World Health Organization to name a few. This has had disastrous consequences for multilateralism across the world as the world's strongest economic and military power has decided to revert to unilateralism. Even amidst a common global enemy like the coronavirus, the US has been further illustrating these tendencies, such as when President Trump apparently sought to unilaterally acquire a German firm with advanced research on Covid-19 in order to acquire exclusive US vaccine production rights which prompted financial aid to the company from the Commission to prevent this from happening[xii].

At the same time, China's growing economic and political weight has fed into a dynamic where accelerated US-China Geopolitical competition (including over flashpoints such as the recent crisis in Hong Kong) and a "deflecting the blame" public relations struggle amidst the pandemic have greatly disrupted the international capacity to organise and respond to the virus coherently, and have left third-parties such as the EU in the cold in the ongoing information warfare.

Indeed, the European Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen, has described itself as a "Geopolitical Commission", but has not delivered much yet on that level. The European Union could make use of this pandemic and the US-China rivalry to create an opening for a new alliance, regrouping like-minded partners willing to both defend the multilateral order, protect their democracies against information warfare, and to find a vaccine together on fair terms, such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, India and many African nations. All participating countries in this arrangement would not need to share exactly the same values and principles. Nonetheless, multilateralism, the willingness to save international cooperation and to find a solution to this crisis should be at the core of this potential alliance. This would definitely be a golden opportunity for the European Union to show its geopolitical role and to strengthen its strategic autonomy in an increasingly polarised world. The Commission has already set up a framework campaign, the Coronavirus Global Response, which raised 16 billion euros from 40 countries and more individuals in May and June in several pledging conferences. With a capacity to produce 250 million vaccines for lower- and middle-income countries, it is clearly an attempt to claim global multilateral leadership in the response against Covid-19[xiii]. Such a potential alliance could be expanded into areas in which the EU can claim strong leadership, such as the Climate Crisis and Sustainable Transition.

**Conclusion**

As Monet reminds us, Europe will be forged in crisis and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises. A decade of stress has significantly expanded the Union's competences to respond to a wide range of issues and brought it into the public view and discussion but lacking the appropriate engagement with citizens and self-definition, internally and in the wider world. Covid-19 poses an unprecedented economic, political and social shock to a Union which can ill afford to let the moment pass.

With the experienced and energetic German Presidency of the Council, large electoral support for most pro-European governments, and a great impetus for greater solidarity from citizens from Lisbon to Warsaw, Europe should not let this "good crisis" go to waste in order to do justice to its citizens and its responsibilities in the world and provide both breath to the lungs of its people and to its own future.[2]

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[2] Several of the analyses and proposals reflected in this article were the result of co-authorship with Thibault van Stouten, student at the College of Europe in Natolin 2019-2020, as part of the production of another piece on a similar topic for the College of Europe. The author has made sure to take out the direct contributions of the latter from this piece but some of the paragraphs may reflect some of their conclusions.

# CHAPTER VI

# COVID-19 AND THE CLASH OF ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY

**What now? - An essay on how the COVID-19 crisis relates to global affairs**
by Sarah Oey

**COVID-19 and the Environment**
by Peter Akkerman

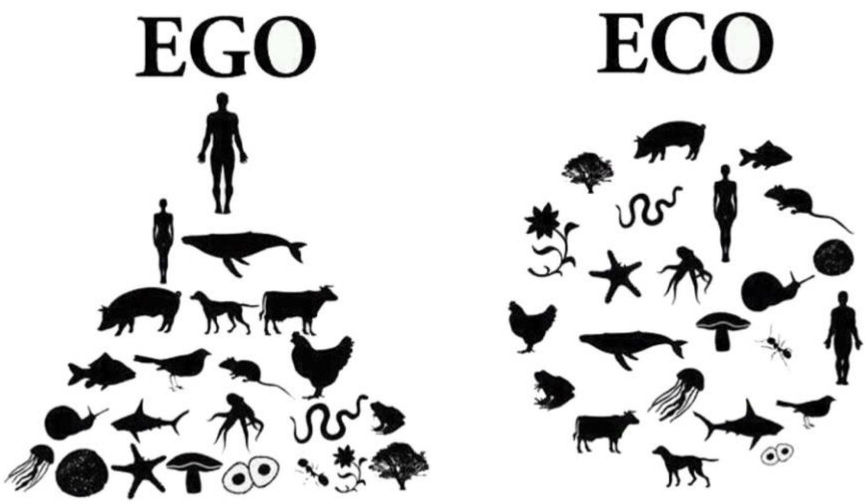
**COVID-19 and Ecosystem Services**
by Michiel Firet

**Towards a socio-political and multispecies perspective on COVID-19**
by Nadine Voelkner

## What now? - An essay on how the COVID-19 crisis relates to global affairs

*By Sarah Oey*

Despite the fact that the COVID-19 crisis is a worldwide pandemic which causes a lot of harm, it brings along an opportunity to change the way in which we organize society. We should be happy we cannot go back to normal because normal was the problem.




*Source: Conscious Travel*

COVID-19 has affected the way in which we live and therefore we should start rethinking how we shape the world around us and how we bring everything in perspective. To elaborate, the COVID-19 crisis does not arise from just bats. The crisis represents a deep, complex and rooted problem which we do not seem to be able to solve. We have created a way in which it is comfortable for us to live our lives. However, humankind puts itself on top of a pyramid, while barely considering the importance of others. Humankind has created a fairytale in which the human is the protagonist. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis has shown us that putting yourself first does not always bring you flowers: we should reconsider our way of life and our place within the ecosystem in order to survive.

According to Peter Daszak, human activity has made a real contribution to the transformation of our ecosystem (Daszak, 2020). Human activity has increased over the years which was at the expense of mostly the atmosphere, oceans, landscapes and rainforests. Moreover, half of the world's tropical forest has transformed into agriculture and human settlements (Daszak, 2020). Following Daszak (2020), before humans became involved and connected with one another, a virus infecting a hunter-gatherer might only reach family members and friends. Our involvement into the eco-system brings along serious consequences and COVID-19 is one of them. Again, this shows we should start re-considering the position of the humankind in a more modest way. If we want to prevent outbreaks of diseases in the nearby future, we need to re-evaluate our relation with nature (Daszak, 2020). As stated earlier, we need to scrutinize how we organize our lives and society by critically evaluating (food) consumption, tourism, pollution and energy-use for example. We have destroyed the environment in order to fulfill our needs but the time has come that this destruction means a destruction of the humankind as well.

As the image above suggests, we are all equals and it is time to behave accordingly. Therefore, this is a case that concerns all of us. Although this discussion is nothing new, we do not seem to be working on a fair ecosystem.

According to a German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2019), we need more help from our governments to ensure visible changes. Despite individual changes, such as eating less meat, sustainable transport and a reduction in CO2 emissions, the current form of governance is not working anymore (Reckwitz, 2019). According to Reckwitz (2019), we need to reform the way in which the government plays a role in global affairs. Over the years, an era came into existence where the market determines what is happening. Consequently, many public affairs, such as health care and public transport, were privatized. Aggregate demand and supply became the toy of society in order to enhance economic growth. Nevertheless, Reckwitz (2019) thinks we need to re-think this approach, and even come up with a new one, in order to restore a balanced society.

From this we see that COVID-19 does not only relate to global affairs in its easiest form. As Duszak stated:"Our current approach is to wait for more outbreaks to start, and then design drugs or vaccines to control them. But as we have seen with COVID-19, this approach is not good enough." (Duszak, 2020). We need to start re-adjusting our way of living and even re-thinking governance in order to move from 'ego' to 'eco' (see image). This will concern all of us. Let COVID-19 be a lesson we learn from in order to prevent something like this in the future.

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# COVID-19 and the Environment

*By Peter Akkerman*

During the last few months, the world as we know it came to a halt. Millions of people went into lock-down in an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19, and many public spaces, once filled with people, became deserted. Not only that - the amount of planes in the skies was reduced drastically, commutes disappeared, and demand for luxury goods declined.

**The opportunity and the call for action**

However, with limitations in freedom of movement and the resulting slowdown of the economy also came unexpected benefits. The levels of pollution of our environment in this period had been drastically reduced.[i] The normally smog-filled skies above cities such as Beijing, Deli and Bogotá have become clearer - and in many cities across the world, blue skies where seen for the first time in a long while.[ii] In countryside villages in Wales local goats flocked to city centres which were now free of traffic.[iii] And due to the reduction of sound pollution from cars and planes, the author was for the first time woken up by the cheerful sound of birds in the otherwise busy city of the Hague. COVID-19 became a desperately needed breather for our planet and its non-human inhabitants after hundreds of years of struggle due to over-exploration, pollution and overconsumption by humans.

However, this temporarily lessened strain on our environment is only a drop in the ocean, and long lasting effects require much bigger transitions. A healthy biosphere is a prerequisite for a healthy society, which in turn is the basis for a healthy and sustainable economy that should work for all.


Now is the time to make a difference, and use this window of opportunity to start a green recovery where we can at last live in harmony with nature and with ourselves. However, this is not only an opportunity - this is also a dire call to action. If we do not manage to create a world where people live in balance with nature, outbreaks of pandemics like COVID-19 might become much more frequent.

The origin of this pandemic, as we understand it now, is fundamentally linked to the ongoing environmental crisis. Destruction of nature and with it animal habitats, large-scale livestock farming, as well as animal trade practices where different species are packed together in small spaces, are a breeding ground for zoonotic diseases - diseases that jump from animals to humans like COVID-19.

**What COVID-19 tells us about zoonotic diseases and the environmental crisis**

A proposed explanation of the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the disease was likely initially transmitted from a bat, then onto other animals, and then onto humans. According to a recent UNEP report, over 70% of all emerging infectious diseases such as COVID-19 are zoonotic.[iv] In zoonotic diseases, the emerging pathogen - an organism that causes disease - is more likely to be a virus than bacteria, parasite or fungus, and more likely to have a broad range of hosts. The close interactions between wildlife and livestock or humans exposes them to the risk of potential pathogen spillover. For many zoonoses, livestock frequently serves as an epidemiological bridge between wildlife and human infections. COVID-19 is not the first zoonosis that emerged or re-emerged recently, there are many others: bird flu (avian flu), Ebola, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Rift Valley fever, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), West Nile virus and the Zika virus disease.[v]

According to the UNEP report *Preventing the next pandemic - Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission,* there are three types of changes that allow virulent pathogens to initiate a new move from an animal to a human host.[vi] These are changes to the environment, changes in animal or human hosts, or changes to the pathogen itself. Firstly, changes in the environment are usually the result of human activity - significant land use change (think of agriculture), deforestation, habitat fragmentation, settlement, or climate change. Climate change, for example, alters weather patterns, making extreme weather events more likely, shifting minimum and maximum temperatures and precipitation. This, in turn, can change animal habitats, and with that the corresponding distribution areas of disease, pathogens and pests. As a result, changes in ecosystems can lead to increased pathogen transmissions between hosts. Changes in animal or human hosts are often the result of human activity as well. Changes in human host behaviour includes conflicts, migration, travel, wildlife trade, urbanization and changes in dietary preferences or medical practices. Lastly,

**Don't blame the bats**

Bats, the only mammals that can fly and an animal that offers numerous important ecosystem services, are widely seen by scientists as the source of today's pandemic. Bats harbour many pathogens but are usually able to suppress them. However, when bats are stressed by human infringement of their habitat, by having their habitat damaged by deforestation, by being hunted or by being kept in wet markets, the bat's immune system is challenged and the bat finds it harder to cope with the pathogens is harbours.

Andrew Cunningham, Professor of Wildlife Epidemiology at the Zoological Society of London, explains: "It would allow infections to increase and to be excreted- to be shed. You can think of it like if people are stressed and have the cold sore virus, they will get a cold sore. That is the virus being 'expressed.' This can happen in bats too." It is therefore importaint that bat habitats, or any animal habitats for that matter, are properly protected. In several countries, including the Netherlands, bats are labbeled as a protected species and extensive measures are taken to not infringe on their habitats.

there are changes in the pathogen itself - as pathogens always evolve to exploit new hosts. All of these can result in the emergence of zoonotic diseases.

Studies used for UNEP reports on the matter find that the emergence and re-emergence of zoonotic diseases are closely linked with the health of ecosystems.[vii] Human-induced environmental changes modify wildlife population structures and reduce biodiversity, resulting in new environmental conditions that favour particular hosts, vectors, and/or pathogens. For example, the dominance of monocultures lets some wildlife thrive while others are forced out. Such concentrations of large populations of a few species increase the chance of a disease occurring and jumping the species barrier. In pristine ecosystems, all biological systems have an inherent capacity for both resilience and adaptation, but the current pace of change may be too fast for systems to adapt or evolve and maintain resilience.[viii] Ecosystem integrity can help regulate diseases by supporting a diversity of species so that it is more difficult for one pathogen to spill over, amplify or dominate.

Similarly, human action can force together species which used to have little contact with each other. In some cases, destruction of natural habitats forces species to migrate to other areas such as cities, coming into contact with local fauna, including pets and humans. Another example are the exotic animal markets or "wet markets", where wide varieties of animals are packed close together to be sold for human consumption or at times for ingredients used in (traditional) medicinal practices, or as pets.

This can have disastrous consequences: when SARS broke out in China in 2002, civet cats - a delicacy in southern China - served as an intermediate host between humans and bats.[ix] A decade after the large SARS outbreak, an outbreak of the new Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) was caused by a coronavirus called MERS-Cov. This time, the intermediate hosts were dromedary camels. So far there is no conclusive evidence to confirm the transmission chain of SARS-CoV-2 – the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 - and what animal served as an intermediate host between bats and humans.[x] More research is needed to clarify whether the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan was the origin of the outbreak.[xi]

**Where do we go from here?**

According to the UNEP report, the best way to prevent zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 is to give nature enough space to take care of itself.[xii] Therefore we need to conserve and expand nature, protect biodiversity and take action to clean up our environment. In this light, the Netherlands is currently in the process of releasing its new environmental vision (het Nationaal Milieubeleidskader, NMK[xiii]) as the basis for future environmental policy and decision-making. The COVID-19 outbreak is one of the reasons why, after 20 years, a new vision is written.

What is new in this vision is that the policy focus shifts from cleaning up current environmental pollution to also strongly emphasise preventing pollution from occurring in the first place. Other key points are the protection of habitats through a ban of certain pesticides, progressively stricter regulations on polluters, a shift towards circular economy where all trash is recycled, products are fully recyclable and Safe-by-Design. These are ways the Netherlands - together with European and international partners - hopes to put a halt to the pollution and destruction of nature.

For example, in the case of circular economy, this can be achieved by reducing the amount of land and nature used for resource mining, landfills and related activities. Environmental protection also has direct effects on our well-being: for example, today around 11,000 people in the Netherlands die prematurely every year due to air pollution. We hope to slash that number in half by 2030 by reducing harmful emissions with our Clean Air Agreement (Schone Lucht Akkoord). Similar actions will be taken to reduce the 3000 annual deaths caused by exposure to dangerous substances in workplaces; and to address the increasing number of people who experience a wide range of potentially hazardous health effects from ingested micro plastics - such as cancer, infertility and obesity.[xiv]

These are some steps in the right direction, but more action is needed globally. Everyone can do their bit - we urgently need more top-down and bottom-up action. Do you need to take the plane to your holiday destination? Do you need to buy more new clothes all year round? Do you buy food that is grown without the use of pesticides or do you grow it yourself? You can also petition policymakers and get involved in political decision-making. You can you recycle your trash. Consume food that is grown sustainably. Buy products from responsible companies. Isolate your house. Minimise the amount of plastic you use. Buy a plot of land to give it back to nature. The options for helping to keep the world habitable for all earthlings are endless!

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## COVID-19 and Ecosystem Services

*By Michiel Firet*

**Revival of the nearby**

For a long time Corona was associated with a Mexican beer brand, sunny beaches and crowded pubs. Nowadays Corona means social distance and limited travelling. And, at least in the Dutch situation, it means a revival, a rediscovery of the natural landscape nearby, where people start walking again. But, camp sites, hotels, restaurants, bars, outdoor-festivals and public transport went in a lockdown. In June 2020 the lockdowns are loosening a little bit and all over Europe governments, entrepreneurs and guests dare to think about the summer holidays.

Will it become the same as it was? I don't think so. The SARS pandemic, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the climate change – a crisis in slow motion – show us the worldwide necessity to evaluate and consider our behavior concerning a lot of elements in our society. E.g. the relationship man – (natural) animal, the resilience of our supply chains and our vision on strategic stocks, the revaluation of vital professions and so on.

**Tourism a vulnerable economy**

This Corona crisis makes it very clear also how local, regional and some national economies depend on tourism. On a regional scale the trilateral Wadden Sea region was hit hard. Local governments closed the islands directly. Local inhabitants supported this measure because it was the best way to keep the Covid-virus as far away as possible. But the entrepreneurs wanted to continue their business on the islands as good as possible. Imagine, this businesswoman is also an inhabitant, in a small social community. This socioeconomic situation is thus characterized by a big dilemma. With the loosening of lockdowns, the first reflex is to regain the old situation as soon as possible. Public transport capacity limitations seem to be the bottleneck. In 2019 though, last year, entrepreneurs on the islands were complaining that they couldn't get enough employees. The limits of local capacity became visible although the policy remains to increase the amount of visitors all over the year (seasonal extension).

**Need for reconsiderations**

For me it is very clear that this Covid19-crisis is an early warning for a situation we have to get used to. Corona will not be the last virus-based pandemic. Our global climate goals will force us to reconsider our global travel-behavior. And they will force us to reconsider the way food is produced, transported and consumed all over the world. We have to adapt to climate changes. We are too late, the climate is changing, with a rising sea level, and with increasing temperatures and shifting climate zones. Maybe North West Europe will get a subtropical climate. More sandy beaches and more long balmy evenings with a Corona-beer on a terrace? Sounds attractive. Or is it just locally attractive, and for the short term? The overarching question is in my opinion "where are the sustainable places to live for mankind worldwide, which food system will fit and what does that mean for the rest of the socioeconomic system"?

**Traveling as a necessity of basic needs?**

The Pyramid of Maslov (1943) can help us. Of course, this theory is attractive, but criticized even by Maslov himself. Nevertheless, it can help us to formulate our thoughts. A safe place to live, food to eat and social contacts are basic needs. 'Discovering the world' will follow. But what has happened on sites like the Wadden Sea Islands, the Costas of Spain, the snow resorts in the Alps and so on? The local community depends on tourism for income. So the need of global guests to enrich themselves has evolved to a necessity of local communities to fulfill their basic needs.

**Ecosystem services as baseline**

Why do these guests come to these superb places? Yes of course, the sunny beaches and the good drinks in cozy bars. But it's also, or mostly, the attractive natural landscape and the local heritage. Where we have to bear in mind that this heritage, e.g. Venice of Amsterdam, is a result of a long-term process of people who stayed and developed their living and economical activities on those sites where the ecosystem services were the most beneficial. So, people visit tourist hotspots because of the actual natural landscape or because of a heritage based on regional ecosystem services, in the past and/or actual present.

What is the socioeconomic prosperity of Kreta or Terschelling without tourism? A little bit of food production, a little bit of harvesting of food from nature (whale and tuna?), a small amount of clothes from wool or local plants as stinging nettle. That's it. The poor soils and the extremes in the local climate do not give so much more opportunities. Maybe these local economies can benefit from the demand for renewable energy, but that conflicts with the quality of the natural landscape and its – also important – biodiversity.

**Redesign on a global scale**

The Covid19-crisis amplifies for me the first thoughts about a redesign of our local, regional and global social-economic system, based on an all-inclusive utilization of the present ecosystem services. Which means for me the redesign of clusters of food productions on sites worldwide with the best options (soils and climate), with increasing shared knowledge and with regional, not global, supply chains. And which means for me an acceptance of the limits of some natural environments. Which means a limitation of what can and cannot be extracted from certain environments. When e.g. Norderney, Texel, Crete and Venice remain attractive to visit, what is their carrying capacity? What does that mean for who is, and who isn't allowed to come? And as these sites have a limited carrying capacity, how can we achieve a sound local socio-economic situation? Difficult questions with no easy answers. Let us at least start the dialogue, for which I offer two further thoughts.

**Disconnect benefit and income**

Will it help us to disconnect the direct relationship between work and income on the spot? The natural environment of the Wadden Sea region is beneficial for the Dutch society as a whole. So, why not pay every Wadden Sea Region inhabitant a basic income, just to be there and to preserve this natural environment and its ecosystem services. This will disconnect the debate about carrying capacity from the need of a financially sustainable local social community, with schools etc.

**Scale of carrying capacity**

And, on which regional scale do we have to look at carrying capacity? Every Wadden Sea Island on its own? Every Greek island or Spanish Costa on its own? Or as a regional ecosystem of attractive sites to visit, enriching the regional narrative because the sites are part of a larger picture. And with Destination Management Organisations (DMO's) who helps to welcome, guide and distribute in place and time the visitors. DMO's which are cooperating also on national and international levels. Destinations that are no longer competitors of each other, but parts of an overarching attractive offer.

**Dialogue**

In this essay I expose elements of my own vision on society. I am aware of that. I think that a sound dialogue starts with sharing visions, searching other approaches and the guts to rethink and redesign the way we handle things. The Corona-crisis and the crisis in slow motion of climate change are a wakeup call, and/or will force us to do so. I hope this essay is just a brick in the wall.

*Michiel Firet is the program manager and strategic advisor for Staatsbosbeheer and the 'Programma naar een Rijke Waddenzee', a public-private collaboration aiming to foster ecosystem resilience and sustainable economic exploitation of the area.*

## **Towards a socio-political and multispecies perspective on COVID-19**

*By Nadine Voelkner*

*We thank the author for allowing us to republish this article. Some formatting changes were made. The original article can be found on the website of the University of Groningen.*

The Covid-19 pandemic reveals to us how human bodies are deeply and irrevocably entangled with viruses and other non-human bodies, including animals such as bats and civet cats, on a global scale. Viral strains move biologically and socially within and across species connecting distant geographies, never entirely inhibited by technoscientific infection barriers and political borders built by biomedical experts and governments to keep them out.

Biologically, we understand better each day how SARS CoV-2 (the germ) infects and moves within its human host, interacts with the viruses, bacteria, and healthy cells which make up the physiology of the human body, and eventually gives rise to Covid-19 (the disease). Medical microbiologists who adapt a configurational or ecological model, however, depart from this germ theory of disease, which has dominated much of biomedical and public health thinking in the past century. These scientists have begun to show us the way disease is not just the outcome of a specific virus or other microbe. According to them, viruses and other microbes are not inherently pathogenic (disease-causing) but their virulence (harmfulness) is very much context-dependent (Méthot and Alizon 2014). Following ecological scholars on the subject across the natural and social sciences, Covid-19 is the outcome emerging from "complex, spatial-temporal interactions between the host immune system and the internal and external microbial environment" (Hinchliffe, Bingham, Allen, and Carter 2016; Lorimer 2017).

Building on this, from a political ecology perspective, studying the social and cultural features of human-environment interactions is just as important as investigating the biological processes in the ecosystem inside the infected body. In this sense, political ecologists are attuned to the human as well as the nonhuman actors involved. For example, as anthropologist Arregui reminds us, while the Chinese province of Hubei was busy dealing with Covid-19, the African Swine Fever Virus (ASFV), another viral strain, was transmitting largely unhindered among local pig populations, while veterinary staff that usually controls this disease were quarantined. While ASFV does not kill humans but domestic and wild pigs, it is nonetheless severely affecting the human world by disrupting farming economies and ecologies in Asia (Arregui 2020). Covid-19 is said to be a zoonotic disease like SARS (2003), avian flu (2004), swine flu (2009), ebola (2014-15), HIV/AIDS (ongoing) and many others - that is, it was passed on from an animal to a human. Here too then, it is important to understand the historical and contemporary socio-political particulars of the human-nature relations which helped create the conditions for a lethal zoonotic transmission to take place. This is often related to human encroachment of natural spaces, increased urbanization, consumption patterns, farming techniques and much more.

Studying the socio-politics of multispecies relations in ecosystems of forests, rural and urban, national and global spaces is necessary to understand the factors that shape human health and healthcare delivery in the Covid-19 pandemic (such as access to Covid-19 tests and vaccines). These combined factors determine how well we will fare in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and what still needs doing to overcome this pandemic and prevent another outbreak, epidemic, or pandemic in future. Asian countries with collective memories of SARS, including Hong Kong and China, Singapore, and Taiwan, have been preparing institutionally and society-wide for another zoonotic outbreak since at least 2003 - though their focus was on avian influenza (Shortridge, Peiris, and Guan 2003). These countries know it is not a question of if another outbreak of pandemic potential will arise but which viral strain will emerge when and where. It is for this reason that research such as the University of Groningen's very own LifeLines biobank research team is extremely important in examining the way genetics as well as environmental factors (co-)determine the outcome of a SARS CoV-2 infection. But much more is needed, especially research that is attentive to multispecies relations in overlapping ecosystems, to pave the way for new ways of living and coexisting with other species in a post-Covid-19 world.

A vaccine, once available, will strengthen the active defense against SARS coronavirus-2 of those in this world privileged enough to receive vaccination. However, failure to take into account the 'vital-lethal' entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies in current national and global Covid-19 responses misses the opportunity to resolutely stem in the long term the (re)emergence of Covid-19 and other infectious diseases (EIDs). In the end, Covid-19 may trigger curiosity about the multispecies entanglement of the world, and animate rethinking how we relate to microbial, animal and other non-human species.

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# CHAPTER VII

# COVID-19 AS AN EXPERIENCE

**In what way does the COVID-19 crisis affect the political, economic, organizational, cultural or other aspects of international organizations and global affairs?**
by Kitty van der Heijden

**Self-Isolation, Online Interactions and the Economics of Loneliness**
by Rizqi Imaduddin

**The Evolution of Sports post COVID-19**
by Ivy Shiechelo

**Prisoners of Science**
by Kevin Chen

## In what way does the COVID-19 crisis affect the political, economic, organizational, cultural or other aspects of international organizations and global affairs?

*By Kitty van der Heijden*

6 months down the road my answer is: in every way! And more... This pandemic not only fundamentally alters work and work priorities, it intrudes in all other parts of your life as well. I work from home most of the time, my children could not go to school for months, the gym is closed, I no longer travel – which by the way is good for the climate!

And although I already knew that I can trust myself when it comes to working under difficult circumstances, I now experienced that working hard in a crisis situation becomes even more difficult, when at the same time you have to live and behave completely different from the way you are used to.

*In a crisis, you take care of what is dearest to you*. As individuals, we took care of those closest to us: our children, our parents, our friends, our neighbors. As the Foreign Office, we were concerned about our staff, both here in the Hague as those in far-flung places. The Dutch government first took care of its own citizens: COVID-victims, patients, elderly, students, workers, companies. But pandemics like this highlight how interconnected this globalized world has become. We knew that we would only be as successful as the weakest link globally. Even if we would be able, though at considerable cost, to successfully eradicate COVID-19 here, infections would soon surge again if it would not be eradicated everywhere.

For me, it was important to recognize that beyond Dutch and European borders, problems were even more urgent than at home. In developing countries with high inequalities and poor health infrastructure, a lockdown can lead to immediate unemployment and hunger as poor have no savings and governments don't have the resources to establish social safety nets to cushion the economic aftershock. In a global world, just as much as we depend on others' strengths to combat corona successfully, they depend on us to support the weakest, most vulnerable populations during a devastating pandemic. Taking responsibility of taking care of them has been driving my work in the past months.

*In a crisis, you really need friends and allies*. Though it was difficult at first to get attention for needs far away, as we were facing a national crisis, more and more voices joined the choir of those arguing in favour of international support and action: IFIs publicly announcing plans to address the needs of poor countries; EU starting its 'Team Europe' approach. But also some Dutch politicians urging their colleagues to look beyond national borders, and the media gradually doing the same. The Netherlands' PM Mark Rutte argued, together with 18 other world leaders, in favour of sustained support for developing countries, in the Financial Times. Based on discussions in parliament, Minister Kaag asked the independent Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) to advise the Government on an appropriate Netherlands' response to the global pandemic. This summer the advice led to a cabinet decision for a substantial rise of pandemic-related resources. And also, just as important, to a partial compensation for cuts in the development budget as due to the link between the Dutch development budget and GDP, the budget was shrinking just as we had to scale up our interventions to protect the poor.

*In a crisis you can find friends and allies more easily, though not always.* A common sense of purpose and urgency helps to overcome differences and political or institutional ego's. From the beginning Minister Kaag reached out to colleagues and institutions around the world to arrive at common goals and join initiatives, as did many others. In unprecedented times, we need unprecedented solidarity. And that is, by and large, what we have seen, at global and national levels. From Germany volunteering to receive and treat Dutch COVID-patients in need of intensive care to Dutch (and other) development agencies scraping together the resources to do what needed to be done, from neighbors taking care of each other to courageous development workers continuing their work in the field. But we have also seen 'PPE nationalism', rising inequalities and abuse of power under the cover of COVID-19. It taught us that cooperation and collaboration, the cornerstones of global peace and stability in an interdependent world, can never be taken for granted. In the year that we celebrate 75 years of United Nations work, we need to be cognizant that it *still* takes time, energy and effort to explain, to maintain and to improve multilateralism. But without it, everybody loses out in today's world.

At another level, I am proud to say, I have witnessed this effect in my own organization as well. We have worked hard to keep the spirits up, professionally and personally, and collectively cared for those that work in difficult circumstances, be they single mothers with small children for which there was no daycare, new colleagues that just joined our organization without ever 'seeing' their team, or our colleagues working in embassies separated from their families.

*In a crisis you need to adapt*. While we were still getting used to Zoom and MS Teams, and around the world countries went into lockdown, our workload doubled. We repatriated colleagues from our embassies when necessary; set up a dedicated COVID-19 Development Task Force; developed monitoring guidelines for situations in which monitoring is complicated; allowed implementing partners to redesign programs and budgets in order to make them part of the fight against the pandemic. And we searched our pockets, delaying planned activities, to get together a first EUR 100 mln package to support pandemic-related programs of experienced NGO and multilateral partners. At the same time we had to prepare for a new situation, a 'new normal' as we call it today, in which the SDGs have suffered a major setback, civic space is shrinking in many places in the world, new geopolitical realities are emerging, and multilateralism is more needed than ever, but far away. I am not naïve, but I do hope that the pandemic will make everyone realize that global threats and increased international interdependency demand coordination efforts if we want to be successful.

*In a crisis you must make time to reflect, and prepare for the next one*. After an initial period in which people first deny, then resist and subsequently accept, the realization dawns that your real job is not just to cope, but also to plan ahead and to innovate. We tried, at different levels. In order to allow us to evaluate the impact of our 'COVID 19 programme' and to learn from our efforts, we designed ways to track all pandemic-related expenditure and to monitor projects under COVID 19 circumstances. But we also forced ourselves to take time to discuss ways in which to 'Build Back Better': to make sure that the massive global pandemic-related investment would not simply lead us back to the situation that we knew pre-COVID.

As UNSG Guterres said in this year's Nelson Mandela Lecture:

> *'Let's face the facts. The global political and economic system is not delivering on critical global public goods: public health, climate action, sustainable development, peace.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the tragic disconnect between self-interest and the common interest; and the huge gaps in governance structures and ethical frameworks. To close those gaps, and to make the New Social Contract possible, we need a New Global Deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly and fairly at the international level.'*

It is indeed my ambition to build back a more sustainable future, with stronger institutions, better capable of serving those that need it most. We co-created this 'BBB'-concept with many others, picking up ideas in New York, in Africa, in Europe. I remember dedicating this year's 'Nordic+' strategy conference in April to this topic, exchanging ideas and getting excited that, apart from disaster, the pandemic might also present us with opportunities. If we manage to spend 17% of the global GDP in emergency and recovery packages, just imagine what we could achieve if we were to spend all that money in line with the latest climate science and in service of reducing inequalities... It could be our best chance (or the very last chance) to keep the world of 1,5 degree temperature rise within reach – or to achieve the SDGs in the next decade. Ever since, we have been further developing 'BBB', with partner countries, in EU- and UN-circles, and with implementing partners. I want it to be the Leitmotiv in everything we do together. And I hope young people will help us realize this – by demanding action in this spirit.

*In a crisis, you must take rest*. And allow the people working with you to do the same. I wrote this blog while on vacation. Looking back, 6 months down the road I felt really tired, but also proud and – partly - satisfied. The challenges ahead are gigantic. But I succeeded in coping with COVID 19 in my personal life as well as in my work. As did other donor organizations and the multilateral development system as a whole: setting aside differences and struggling together through the pandemic, trying to bring perspective to a dignified future for those in need. To build back better towards a trajectory in which the SDGs can be reached. The poor of this world expect nothing less from us. And global stability may depend on it.

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## Self-isolation, Online Interactions and the Economics of Loneliness

*By Rizqi Imaduddin*

There is a lifestyle in Japan that is characterized by extreme social withdrawal and reclusivity. It is called *Hikikomori.* A common trait of Hikikomori is that they tend to spend all day and every day at home - doesn't that sound familiar? Everyone around the world had a taste of the Hikikomori lifestyle for the past few months. The global pandemic has forced everyone to spend a prolonged period of time at home, usually only leaving to get essential supplies. During this time, millions of businesses lost their income, people started to lose their jobs and the global economy prepared for the worst. To combat the loss of physical customers, many businesses have switched to online sales. While commerce and trade were stagnating around the physical world, business done over the internet has seen a massive increase in traffic, demand and sales. The pandemic has accelerated the move of business from the physical to the digital. This is driven by constant demand of consumers that does not stop even if one can't physically purchase an item in person. During the quarantine, demand revolves around what is essential, such as food, medicine, entertainment, comfort, etc. These basic needs can all be purchased and obtained through e-commerce and these basic needs drive certain websites through the pandemic. All of humanity's basic needs can be summarized in the Maslow hierarchy of needs. However, one tier in the hierarchy is 'belonging and love'. During the time of social distancing, 'belonging and love' is in high demand but low supply. This is what drives us to online interactions and the often ignored side of e-commerce. In this article I will thus deal with the so-called 'economics of loneliness'.

E-commerce is not a brand new thing, it's been around since the late 90's. As e-commerce developed throughout the years, purchasing and obtaining goods is easier than ever. Food and supplies can now simply be delivered to your doorstep. On Amazon, you can buy anything from toilet paper to cans of beans. The pandemic has created so much demand for goods that Amazon had to hire 175,000 additional employees as a response to the surge in orders. Amazon was facing a surge in demand like it had never seen before. It had to create new features, such as the waitlist for its home and grocery delivery service and shifted its focus to delivering essential supplies first. Amazon even deleted some features such as their "customers who bought this item also bought" and one-day shipping options to stop people from buying too much. However, despite all the struggles, Amazon's efforts paid off immensely. Amazon brought in $75.4 billion in revenue in a three-month period. The same success is also mirrored in the food and beverage industry. It is no surprise that the food and beverage industry is one of the hardest hit industries during this time and it is of no surprise that they are now scrambling to digitize their business. In America alone, KFC and Pizza Hut saw their sales dramatically increasing during this time when it is estimated by the US National Restaurant Association that the industry would lose $225 billion. People still need food and supplies and when you can't physically leave your house, you have to rely on the supplies reaching you. The pandemic, while economically devastating to almost all industries, has accelerated the growth of e-commerce.

On the other side of this technological business boom is the telecommunication industry. Just like how people's demand for their basic needs never stops, the need to communicate also does not stop during the quarantine. With workers being forced to take their work home and students being forced to study at home entirely, mass telecommunications platforms are in high demand. People are choosing from platforms such as Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom. Many of these platforms saw a significant increase in the number of users during the quarantine period. People are not only using it for business meetings or online lectures but the quarantine has also changed the way we use the internet. People are using it to hang out with friends, be it by watching movies together, playing games, celebrating occasions or just interacting with them in general. It is an easy way for people to stay connected to their families and friends and thus rebranding the term 'social distancing' to 'physical distancing', as we remain social by keeping our distance. The biggest winner in this telecommunication war is Zoom. The pandemic has skyrocketed the company's valuation to $58 billion. Zoom owes its success to simplicity. Its simple layout makes it easy for anyone to understand and even before the quarantine it was already implemented in many businesses as a go-to teleconference tool. The simplicity of Zoom is also its downfall as it was notoriously easy to enter an uninvited meeting and this drawback has drawn criticism. However, even with all the backlash, Zoom has become the king of quarantine. The platform has dominated in the creation of a new normal. This new normal is shaped by the interactions we do online now. This is due to another aspect of the Maslow hierarchy of needs - love and belonging. Zoom and all the telecommunication platforms have become the only way for many people to maintain friendships, intimacy and connections. The fact that we can now fully be self-sustained in our homes does not discount our needs for connections, especially during a time of uncertainty where we are vulnerable to feeling lonely. Unintentionally it seems that we have managed to commodify loneliness.

E-commerce has eliminated the limit to what can be commodified. They even have managed to commodify loneliness. Loneliness is a real problem that is often overlooked. Loneliness and being alone are two completely different aspects of the human experience. I recognized that some people find being alone to be much preferable than with a group of people. Therefore, I will refer to loneliness as a state of the mind while being alone as a state of being. Loneliness isn't exclusively tied to being alone but the two are correlated. Gen Z and Millennials are often called the 'loneliest generation' and it's not without reason. Since 2013, millennials have seen a 47% increase in major-depression diagnoses. Self-isolation and social distancing are exacerbating this problem. In a time where people are desperately seeking meaningful connections, the internet seemingly has found a way to exploit this. The internet and the continuous growth of means of telecommunication is a double edged sword. The rise of video-chat platforms like Zoom and the current race between nearly all social media to be the bridge of communications, the options for the younger generation seems to be plentiful. But is this enough? Research shows that younger people may reduce loneliness when their social media usage is reduced. This may be because social media make it easier for people to feel left out and during this pandemic, social media serve as a reminder of people's absence in someone's life. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram allow for a one-sided mirror into another people's life. A life in which you are left out. A paradox exists in which, the more connected you are, the more you feel left out. This is when other forms of social media platforms exist. I want to highlight the current relevance of Onlyfans.

Onlyfans highlights the current problem of loneliness that is exacerbated by the pandemic. Onlyfans is a subscription-based content service where 'content creators' can charge viewers to view their work. What possibly started out as a harmless platform for artists and creators to share their works or content while getting paid has spiraled into, for a lack of better word, the realm of pornography. This is due to the platform's lack of content restrictions that has allowed for content that will usually be banned in other platforms to thrive in Onlyfans, which includes nudity and even pornography. What makes Onlyfans different from ordinary pornography sites is the interactions between creators and consumers. While a conventional pornography website is simply a one-way interaction between the watcher and the creator, Onlyfans creators can host live streams, mass text and privately message their viewers, as well as other interactive features. This allows for the creation of a relationship between the watcher and creator and effectively blurs the line between quasi-social and interpersonal relationships. This type of relationship is Onlyfans key to success. Due to the large number of creators, maintaining a fanbase is paramount for creators. The connection one creator has to their fans is what separates them from the thousands of other creators. For some Onlyfans creators, they have even created what is called 'the girlfriend experience' in which for a certain price, the creators will even pretend to be the user's girlfriend. For the users of Onlyfans, this type of connection is what they are looking for. As a result, Onlyfans saw a 75% increase in new users and around 200,000 new people subscribing to Onlyfans every day during a 2-month period between March and April alone.

Companionship seems to be a luxury that many can't afford and for those that have it, simply brush it off as a non-problem. Onlyfans allow its users an experience unlike any other social media platform. Unlike platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, users of Onlyfans don't get the feeling of being left out while using the platform. Unlike Tinder and other online dating services, the interaction between users does not depend on one's physical appearance and the way they present themselves. All it depends on is whether or not you can afford it. Quarantine and lockdown did not cause this problem, it merely accelerated it. In China, 'Hormone Industries' is a common term used to describe websites like Onlyfans. Due to China's extremely skewed gender ratio, unfortunate males are relying on websites like this to interact with a potential partner all while paying countless amounts of money for this service. Onlyfans was not the first one to commodify loneliness nor will it be the last one. The problem that used to be tied to a specific cultural and social background have now spread.

Before Onlyfans, there was the video streaming platform twitch.com. It is a platform to host live streaming videos, from online gaming to making music, and it is still arguably a harmless video website akin to YouTube. What makes Twitch different from YouTube is that, because Twitch is primarily live streaming, viewers can interact with content creators and other viewers almost instantly in the 'chat'. During the quarantine period, the numbers of viewers in Twitch skyrocketed and broke their all-time high, with 15 million daily viewers. Although Twitch remained for the most part harmless, there have been accusations that Twitch itself is promoting the more suggestive streamers. But even if you are not a suggestive creator, the charm of platforms like Twitch is to be a part of a community. The relationship between creators and users is the key. The reasoning behind the success of live streaming platforms can also be explained by the success of zoom and other telecommunication platforms, virtual contact can be as effective as physical contact.

A new study has found that virtual eye contact has the same impact on our nervous system that in person eye contact does. It seems the feeling of interacting with other humans is the same in the digital world as in the physical world. Even though they are not the same, the mental stimuli is similar. The caveat of this research is the fact that the subject needs to feel the presence of another subject and thus if one person believes there is another person behind a video wall, the stimuli is the same as if the person is physically interacting with them. This explains why the more successful Twitch and Onlyfans creators are the one that constantly interact with their viewers, the ones who took the time to nurture their fanbase and created a sense of community. This is the sensation that led to many viewers being invested in the content in the long run. This quasi-social relationship is enough for many people, because they acknowledge that there is this other person behind the screen and many feel that their interaction is genuine and not just a simple exchange of service shared with multiple people. This has always been the case ever since the dawn of media: one individual acts as the center of attention and admiration while the rest are the admirer. The admirers will tend to know many things about the individual they admire but not vice versa. This inflated sense of relationship is the danger, the admirer may think that they are closer to their admiration than what is actually real. This quasi-social relationship is the main drive for people to go to these kinds of platforms, it is the chance to form what is perceived to be a meaningful relationship.

The quest for companionship or a meaningful relationship can be difficult, especially during times of uncertainty. People will go to great lengths to try to feel a connection with another individual, this is especially true if the other individual is perceived as attractive. Hormones make this unavoidable. It is simply human nature to try to be closer to someone you deem attractive. The 'hormone economy', as the Chinese media refers to it, seems to be the ideal business model during the pandemic. Epal.gg is a website that allows people to 'rent' gamers to play online games with you for a price. Unlike Twitch and Onlyfans, Epal started out as "Egirl.gg, where they mainly rent out female gamers to play with you, although there were also male gamers in smaller proportions of the overall group of available gamers. This might be because they knew exactly who their main customers are, but they have since changed to Epal and now have a more balanced ratio between male and female gamers. The website launched in March 2020 and had an estimated 2 million visits in May. The act of 'renting' someone to play online games with you is not new, there are countless amounts of individuals advertising their service on websites like fiverr and craigslist. This is the next step of online relationships, renting someone to be your companion for a brief period of time. There are many reasons why someone would want to rent someone to play games with them but the main reason for many is loneliness. Loneliness is a real problem that many people might or might not be able to relate to, however, the rapid growth of these kinds of platforms suggest that people merely refuse to address it. During the quarantine, many people don't have the luxury of being able to spend it with friends, roommates or even family. Loneliness is able to easily affect the way you think. When you feel like you have no one in this world, settling for the superficial and quasi-social might be the only way out. Although hormones play a large role in these kinds of platforms, it might not be fair to call it the 'Hormone industries' due to the fact that people are willing to pay hard earned money to alleviate their loneliness. Just as Zoom saw a drastic increase of their users, sites like Twitch and Epal also saw this sudden growth during the time of lockdown and social distancing. In a time where everyone is clamoring at the chance to connect with someone else, the act of paying for someone's company is merely a necessity. It's an evolution of the creation of a quasi-social relationship. One side earns money while the other receives connections. It is merely the economics of loneliness.

The economics of loneliness is not a new phenomenon. It is however a side of internet trade that not many people are aware of. Just like how commerce has evolved into e-commerce, where the act of exchanging goods and service is now mainly done online, human interactions have been forced to evolve to be done online. Although in many countries restrictions have been lifted and signs of normalcy have re-emerged, the economics of loneliness is not going anywhere. There will always be lonely people and there will always be a need for interactions. It has become a basic need in and of itself and with the economy still struggling, online work is in high demand. Loneliness has and always will be a problem and I don't fault anyone who seeks it online and I don't fault anyone whose livelihood depends on the creation of this quasi-social relationship. The quarantine has highlighted the existence of such a website and the ease to which we do not even need physical contact anymore. It is easy to simply withdraw from society now that society itself has moved online and everything you need is at the tip of your fingertip. This phenomenon is merely the evolution of trade and the evolution of companionship.

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## The Evolution of Sports post COVID-19

*By Ivy Shiechelo*

**Introduction**

As of 2018, the sports industry was valued at approximately $471 billion, evidencing a lucrative and very successful industry. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, sports events have been disrupted at an international, regional and national level. Numerous events and sports leagues have been postponed or cancelled such as the Olympics, Paralympics and the European Football Championship which were scheduled to take place in the Summer of 2020. There are many leagues that faced over three month suspensions such as the English Premier League, Italy's Serie A, Spanish La Liga and Turkey's Super Lig and resumed operations in June 2020. Further, athletes have also witnessed the postponement of major marathons such as the New York and the Boston marathon. The Formula One Grand Prix whose season was scheduled to begin in March 2020 was cancelled after a McLaren team member contracted the virus and only resumed with the Austrian Grand Prix in July 2020. Another sport affected by the pandemic is tennis, in which the Wimbledon tennis Championship scheduled for June 2020 was cancelled, being the first cancellation since World War II.

Speculation has arisen that until a vaccine/cure is discovered, there is a likelihood that multiple waves will occur or further shutdowns. Seeing the measures States are taking in the efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, there are several aspects of sports that are likely to evolve due to the pandemic, namely;

1. Team-Sports
2. Player contracts and international regulations
3. Broadcasting contracts
4. Sponsor deals
5. Live matches
6. Involvement of National Federations

**Dynamic changes**

1. **Team-Sports** may suffer with individual sports dominating due to the possible restrictions on number of people per gathering.

Social distancing measures that are being implemented by Governments have put a strain on the effective participation of team sports. With some government limiting the number of people per gathering to as low as 10 people, certain team sports are likely to be affected. As a result, there is likely to be a change in the dynamics of team sports by embracing more individual events.

2. **Player contracts and international regulations** relating to the same will be revisited to allow for less stringent intricacies. For instance in football, the transfer window periods may be altered to factor in such unforeseeable circumstances.

As with many sports, player contracts govern the relationship i.e obligations and rights between clubs and the players. Further, international regulations also provide rules and regulations that govern stakeholders' activities. With regards to football, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is the international governing body. One major disruption that has been witnessed is the issue of the transfer window. The FIFA Legal & Compliance Division, there exists a Transfer Matching System Department (TMS). The TMS is an online system that makes international transfers of players between clubs quicker, smoother and more transparent. Transfer windows are solely permitted during a transfer window which is defined as the period in which a club can transfer players from one club to another.

FIFA released Proposed Guidelines that provide recommendations and guidelines to address the situation in relation to football clubs, particularly, the players' contracts and the transfer system. FIFA recognizes the need for amendments of contracts to protect the players and the clubs. So far, the clubs have relied on the *force-majeure* clause. According to the legal dictionary, a force majeure clause is defined as *'a clause that protects the parties in the event that the contract cannot be performed due to causes that are outside the control of the parties, such as natural disasters'* Further, FIFA recommends that expiring player contracts usually end when the season ends, with a termination date that coincides with the end of the season. With the previous suspension and possible future suspension of play in most countries, it is now obvious that the current season will not end when people thought it would. Therefore, it is proposed that contracts be extended until such time that the season does actually end. This should be in line with the original intention of the parties when the contract was signed and should also preserve sporting integrity and stability. In June 2020, FIFA issued new regulations providing flexibility to the transfer window. For instance, the regulations allow players to play for three clubs during one season, up from the usual two.

A similar principle applies to contracts due to begin when the new season starts, meaning the entry into force of such contracts are delayed until the next season actually does start. Accordingly, FIFA strongly encourages clubs and players to work together to find agreements and solutions during the period when football is suspended under Article 119 of the Swiss Code of Performance, the Frustration doctrine under common law. They are similar to the force majeure. Clubs that are unable to deliver the stipulated salaries will be forced to negotiate their contracts and incorporate new measures to adapt. These dynamics can be said to have been experienced by most if not all sports.

### 3. Broadcasting contracts

The unexpected shutting down of sports events has not only impacted the sports themselves but also the broadcasting rights associated with the said sports. It is estimated that the major sports rely on the income generated from broadcasting, and in particular, the five biggest leagues i.e. the Premier League, the National Hockey League (NHL), the National Basketball Association(NBA), the National Football League(NFL) and the Major League Baseball(MLB). The Premier League is estimated to be making £4.35 billion annually from broadcasting revenue [World Economic Forum].

Like other affected aspects of sports, the invoking of force majeure clause is rampant. Not only have sports leagues been forced to re-evaluate broadcasting contracts to cater for the changing circumstances but they also have to find ways to breach the value gap. Seeing as leagues are facing difficulties in the fulfillment of their obligations to the said broadcasters by virtue of the suspension/shutdown, this has caused a ripple effect resulting in the leagues' inability to generate the requisite income. Some leagues have opted to pay broadcasters compensation; some have given them extended contracts or granted them additional rights in a bid to cater for this unforeseeable circumstance. Hence, broadcasters will adopt new contract strategies.

4. **Sponsor deals**

According to Two Circles, global sports sponsorship spending is estimated to decrease by thirty-seven percent(37%). There is an expected decrease from $46.1bn in 2019 to $28.9bn in 2020 due to the pandemic. With most new sponsorship deals being put on hold and existing sponsorship deals being put on hold indefinitely. Currently, automotive, airlines and energy are the biggest sectors that contribute to sponsorship. However, the said sectors were hit hardest by the pandemic with airlines recording all time high losses resulting in the redundancy of most of their employees. Taking this into consideration, clubs/teams will be required to come up with novel ways to generate revenue to cater for the shift in sponsorship deals.

5. **Live matches**

As of June 2020, many sporting events have resumed games while incorporating social distancing measures. Among the said measures is the prohibition of live matches to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 virus. Major sports such as the Formula one and the premier league have resumed with races and matches being conducted behind closed doors.

The reliance on the acquisition of revenue via live matches will be a thing of the past following the social distancing directives by many states. This is taking into account that live games are fundamental in the world of sports especially for cash-flow purposes. Teams will need to develop contingency plans to cater for the lack of ticketing seeing as games are being conducted in 'fan-free' arenas.

6. **National Federations**

The main roles of National Federations relating to a particular sport entails (but not limited to) the organizing of national competitions, the training of officials, providing procedures and rules e.t.c. Seeing as the global pandemic has resulted in financial strain for most if not all sports leagues/teams, National Federations may be required to be more involved in ensuring the best interest of the athletes. For instance, there could be possible mandatory obligations adopted by States for the Federations to play a part in assisting clubs and teams financially.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is safe to say that, like many other sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of sports has experienced its fair share of adversity. This has left stakeholders with no choice but to adapt and restructure certain aspects relating to the same. Certainly, time will tell as to whether the dynamic changes will create a long lasting impact on sports.

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## Prisoners of Science

*By Kevin Chen*

For the past year, I have been throwing myself on the topics of epidemiology and health care crisis management, even before the pandemic hit. As such, I was thrilled when it looked like a new epidemic would hit our world (I was probably one of the few). It seemed like an amazing opportunity to learn how those in charge handle a crisis unlike ever before. My excitement in January was soon replaced with anguish and anxiety. As the epidemic spread across the world, my initial hope of learning best practices in pandemic management was squashed by the protectionist and autocratic measures implemented by nation States. Nonetheless, it might be a perfect time to learn from their mistakes.

So, I started planning my "pandemic year". I wanted to explore as many facets of the pandemic as possible. I started out with writing my first publication on international health law under the assumption that the law is the foundation of most States that adhere to the rule of law. So, I dove headfirst into what is known as global health law. Global health law, like many other international agreements, was founded out of necessity and is binding on all its signatories. It was conjured in the aftermath of the SARS crisis of 2003 with the aim of preventing the internationally disorganized implementation of arbitrary measures (many countries were accused of such back then). Instead, the World Health Organization (WHO) would show the way forward and encourage international cooperation. Herein, it was emphasized that scientific evidence should be the basis of all decisions made by both the WHO and its member States. To clarify, the decision-making body of the WHO entails 194 member States (depending on whether the USA will truly leave the organization). So now, it was hoped, everyone would listen to science. A great victory!

However, reality is often disappointing. Dozens of states have implemented harsh restrictive measures during the current pandemic, often further marginalizing those already marginalized. Most, if not all states, have imposed travel restrictions despite the WHO's pervading advice to refrain from such measures due to their impact on international cooperation and aid. Another problem with science-based decision making is that science is generally not something set in stone. Hypotheses change and assumptions are invalidated. That is just how science works. Combine this inherent characteristic with a novel virus and the cocktail for policy chaos is complete. "Herd immunity!" was the initial response of the UK government. "Complete Lockdown" was another response often used. Yet, these polar opposites stem from the same pool of science. Both have merit and both are viable strategies in epidemic management. So, what now? Most countries didn't want to take risks and therefore erred on the safe side, often imposing restrictive lockdowns. This strategy is clearly scientifically defensible. Many countries in the past have stemmed the tide of epidemics through stringent lockdowns and quarantine. Cuba, for example, implemented one of the most restrictive measures during the HIV/AIDS crisis and currently still has one of the lowest incidences of the virus in the world.

A new milestone in global health law was the incorporation of human rights. For the first time, implementation of health measures under global health law necessitated a human rights consideration. Measures had to be proportional and had to respect the rights and freedoms of peoples equally. It seems a logical decision to incorporate such into global health law, but in the past states have often traded human value for scientific grounding or politics. Many countries in the past have blamed ethnic groups or nationalities for epidemics. For example, Italians, Germans and Britons called Syphilis the "French Disease", whilst the Russians called it the "Polish Disease".

Cuba may have one of the lowest incidences of HIV/AIDS in the world, but this was obtained through mass incarceration of homosexuals in so-called "Sanitariums" regardless of their status. Similarly, our world now again runs the risk of marginalizing groups for the so-called wellbeing of the community. Rights and freedoms have given way to the indispensable freight train called science. And so, again, many States in the world have started targeting those they deem a "risk" of transmission. Slovakia and Romania have implemented severely restrictive measures on Roma people, deeming them a specific health threat despite no concrete evidence suggesting such. Bulgaria went one step further and has cordoned off Roma villages with military blockades calling them "real nests of contagion".

It seems that no matter the age, bigotry and racism will always show their faces when a disease comes to play. These are often accompanied by pseudo-science and twisting of facts. But such a neglect of the essence of human rights can have far-reaching consequences. Many nations have stipulated that even though certain measures might not be compatible with human rights, they sure as hell are with ethics. One such example is the priority setting for breathing equipment. The American Medical Association has enunciated that younger people should receive priority over elders in times of scarcity. This can certainly be deemed ethical under the auspices of consequentialism. However, human rights are not just about ethics, they are there to ensure equality of human value. Violating the principles of human rights has historically often resulted in unforeseen consequences. If such a discriminatory measure as stated above would be implemented, it might similarly have severe unforeseen consequences. Perhaps elders will feel less inclined to seek medical attention which could result in higher mortality or transmission.

Human rights try to guard such inherent feelings of value and should thus be respected. For it must be understood that the rights and freedoms of an individual are the epitome of the human rights of society. Similarly, to the creation of both global health law and human rights, it is a necessity that should drive us. It is necessary to adhere to science to make progress. It is necessary to unite against a threat. But first and foremost, it is necessary to treat everyone with respect.

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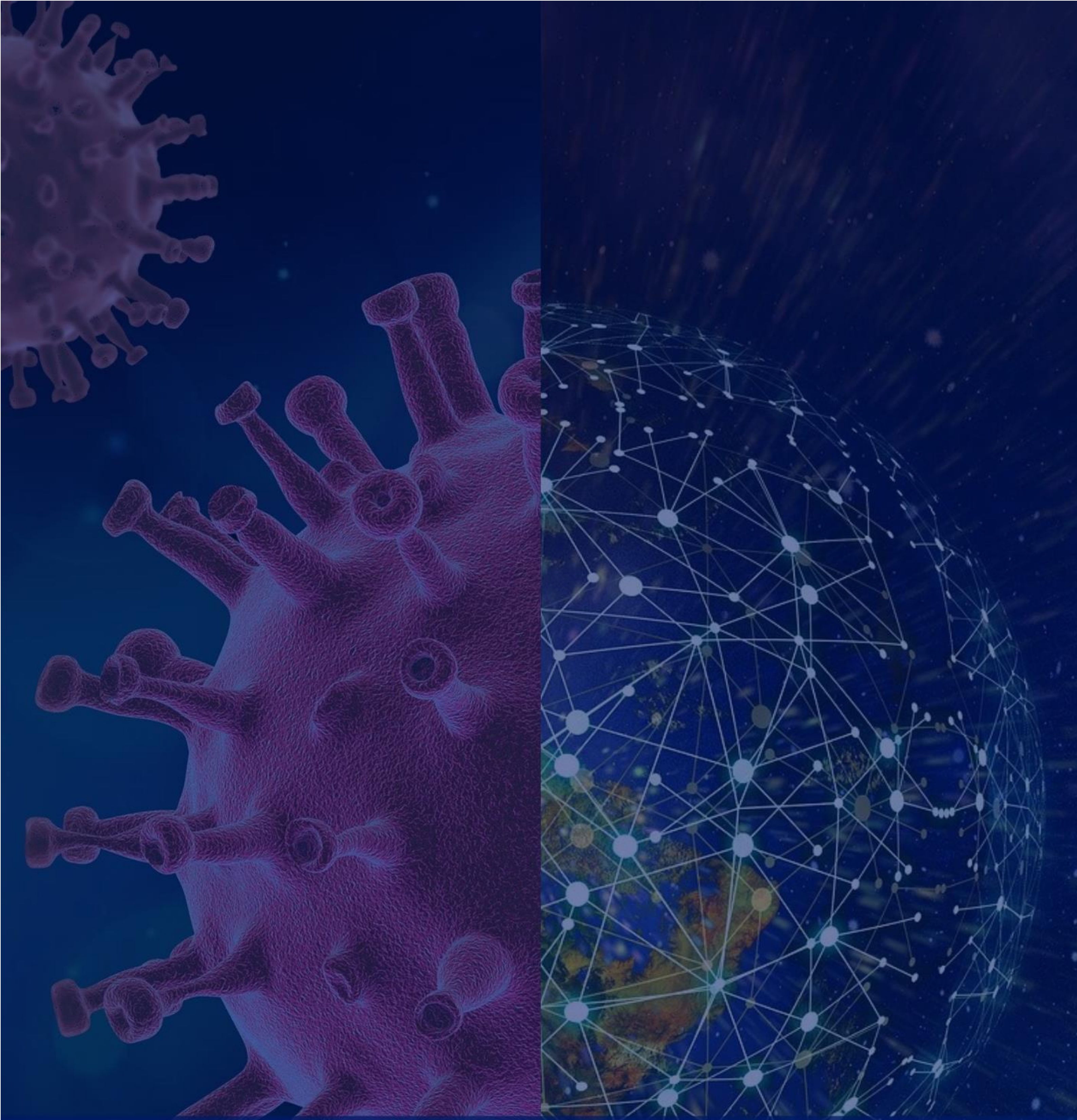

# CONQUERING COMPLEXITY: PERSPECTIVES ON COVID-19

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