

## Our COVID-19 crisis

**(06 May 2020) - Several AEIDL collaborators from different countries, cultures and nationalities have responded to President Márta Márczis' call for contributions. They recount their experiences of being in lockdown, share their thoughts on the unprecedented crisis that we are going through, and express their vision and expectations, for better or worse, for the future.**



**Jean-Luc Janot**, AEIDL (*writing from Vila Nova de Milfontes, Portugal*).

We are living through a period of history worthy of a science fiction film. Who could have said in February 2020, when the media were only incidentally informing us of the shutdown taking place in Wuhan, a relatively unknown 'small' Chinese city of 10 million inhabitants, that the world would almost stop turning barely a month later?

Who would also have thought that the predominantly ultra-liberal global system we live in would 'choose life over economics', to use a phrase that has become a cliché for a few weeks? A new humanism or cynical calculation? Many believe that 'those who lead us' felt that allowing the pandemic to go ahead and accepting millions of deaths would harm the economy even more than the pause, not to say the artificial coma, that has been chosen by most countries around the world. For their part, the most socially 'protective' states have invoked the risk of overwhelmed hospitals, having neglected their health sectors over the past few years.

In any case, the coronavirus crisis has revealed the great lack of preparation of even the most developed healthcare systems: lack of masks, tests, respirators, intensive care rooms... Who boasted of having "the best health system in the world"? Who will still dare to proclaim this false, arrogant and self-satisfied argument so often heard in France, Belgium and elsewhere?

Nevertheless, the months of March and April, like the others that will follow, have questioned our beliefs, values and socio-economic model.

What's that, 90% of our drugs are made in China? And the masks too? What? One of Europe's richest regions, Northern Italy, is the worst affected? And Alsace, and Berlin and Madrid too? And New York? What? The cashier at the supermarket, the truck driver next door, our garbage collectors, seasonal workers, all these 'little hands' are important people? What? I can't go out of my house on pain of a fine? Not even to leave my trendy 'smart city' and go to my second home to the 'rural' people in the country? What? The borders are closed? I thought we were in the Schengen zone...

Based in Brussels, AEIDL is therefore bound to the confinement decreed in Belgium on 18 March. However, a few days earlier, the management had taken the lead by encouraging staff to telework. This is not really surprising since many of the association's members, experts,

freelancers and some other staff live all over Europe and have been used to working and communicating remotely for many years.

We therefore felt that given AEIDL's special situation compared to the vast majority of 'classic' small businesses, we should take this opportunity to share our individual experiences in different European countries and to exchange our thoughts on this unprecedented crisis and the upheavals it has caused in our lives and societies. A call for contributions was launched to AEIDL's members, staff and experts who have been eager to respond.

The following testimonies address the specifics of each respondent's confinement. Their stories, reflections and expectations of the future have identified several dimensions of this multifaceted crisis. The consequences of the pandemic are dramatic but some could be positive as well.

This COVID-19 has revealed the worst of our societies: excess mortality and the difficulty of mourning those who have left; general paralysis and lack of (collective and individual) preparation, which has been particularly evident in the health and elderly care sectors; lack of consideration for the most disadvantaged (homeless, migrants); sharp increase in domestic violence; lack of coordination and the closure of borders between EU countries (back to every man for himself).

Very difficult times lie ahead: an unprecedented economic and therefore social and even financial crisis, with the risk of bankruptcy of entire sectors (tourism, air transport) and the massive unemployment that will follow, leading to a sharp increase of inequality and poverty. The catch-up process of developing countries will stall, and we will need to pay off huge debts very quickly. In relation to our immediate daily lives, we could see the collapse of the hotel and catering industry (whose recovery already seems very problematic), of many other local services and cultural activities (performing arts, festivals). And even more profoundly, there will be questions asked about democracy and the potential for lasting restriction of our freedoms due to the measures taken, such as individual tracking, to combat the spread of the pandemic but also due to repressive political opportunism (e.g. Hungary).

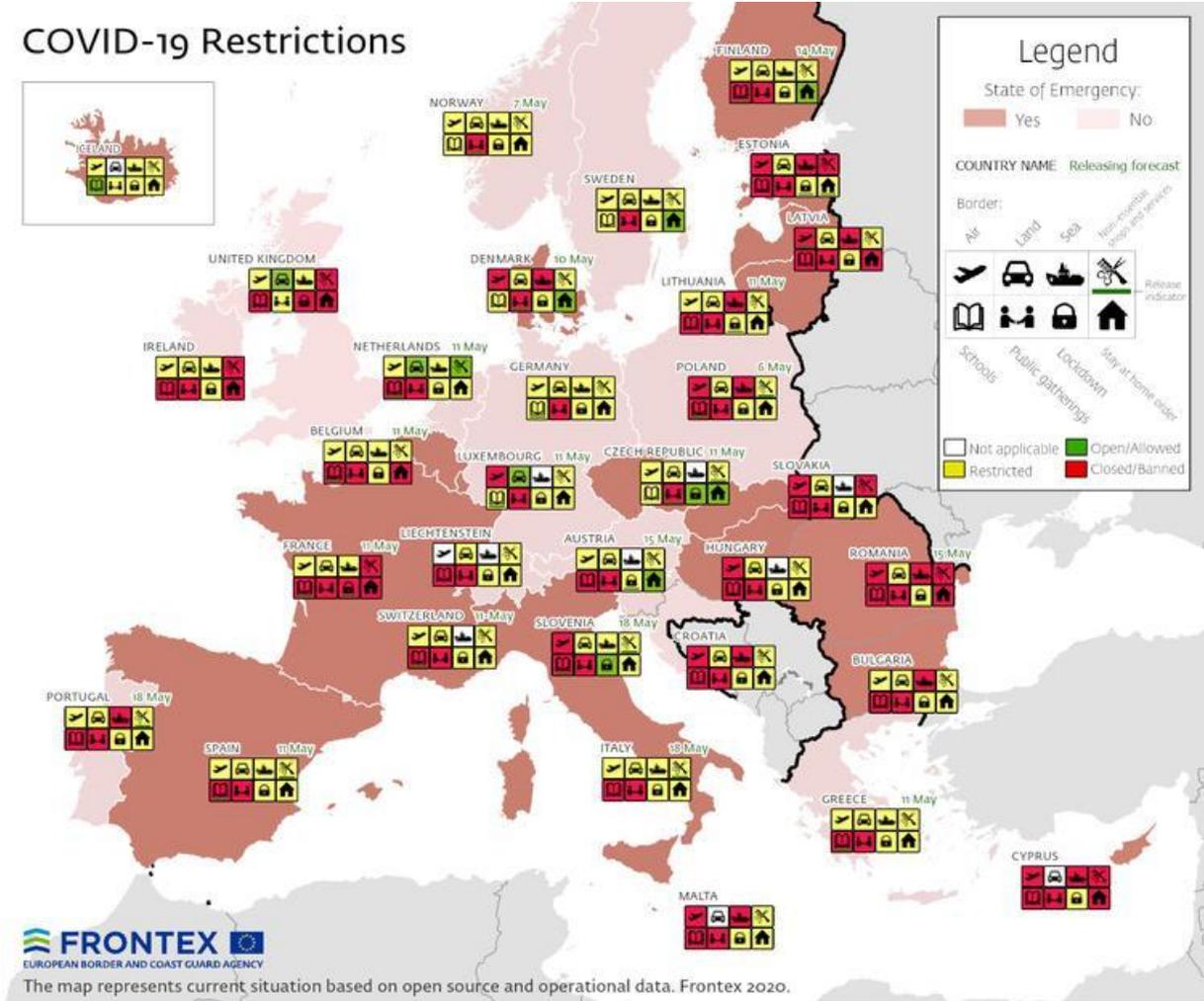
But the crisis is also having a positive impact on our environment, our way of life and our relationships with others: the sharp fall in pollution (air, noise, water); a certain revenge of nature (birdsong and the return of animals to human spaces); the fairly general solidarity of the populations (civic-mindedness, helping the most fragile, altruistic gestures and collective thanks); the recognition of the role of essential workers (starting with the caregivers, seen as everyday heroes); the remarkable adaptation to distance of education systems (from primary to higher education) and the new forms of socialisation thanks to the Internet culture; a certain family intimacy regained, as well as the in-depth (re)discovery of the neighbourhood, its living environment and its conviviality; and the awareness of the importance of things local in general...

This unprecedented crisis opens up several windows of opportunity to be seized: strengthening health services; reinforcing teleworking, which should extend beyond the crisis and facilitate mobility; exploiting generalised distance learning and all sorts of social, cultural and technological innovations that have emerged during the crisis; continuing to give priority to local products and markets; recognising the value of citizen-led initiatives; having a better control of globalisation and relocating certain 'strategic' productions (reindustrialisation of the most developed countries...); giving serious consideration to the introduction of a universal basic income; taking stock of the limits of housing densification and recognising the advantages of rural areas and small and medium-sized towns over big cities (less densely populated areas have been much less affected than the large metropolises); developing soft mobility (the bicycle is once again becoming the 'little queen') despite a probable short-term increase in the use of private car over unsafe public transport; accelerating the green transition, the circular economy, etc.; and relaunching and reinventing the European Union.

What kind of recovery can we expect? A deep and endless crisis? A long austerity period, which will first hit the weakest? The return to individualism and consumerism that has been frustrated

over the past few months? A euphoric and rather generous reconstruction as in 1945? A green recovery?

Modestly, AEIDL's respondents give their thoughts on the world after coronavirus, with a certain optimism. This historic crisis is an opportunity to reinvent many things, starting with our ways of living, working, having fun, producing, consuming and creating together a sustainable and therefore better future.



**Yves Champetier (Montpellier, France): “My Europe is hurting”**

It's been 20 years since we left Brussels. Until last year, we lived in a pleasant suburb of Montpellier, 3 km from the sea, but we have now sold our house. Since the children left home, it had become too big for us and was unsuitable for my wife, Christianne, who has Parkinson's disease.

We are now living 10 km further north, at the southern entrance of Montpellier in a new and pleasant neighbourhood. We hardly need to use the car anymore, most services are on site, and the tramway allows us to reach the heart of the city and other districts. For my part, it is by bike

that I like to travel, but even though there is a lot to be said about the facilities, cycling is not part of the Mediterranean tradition. However, the situation is beginning to change radically.

In any case, the confinement is strict in France: no more cycling, travel allowed for a maximum of one hour, and less than one kilometre from home. In fact, we don't go out much, and Christianne didn't go out for the first four weeks of the crisis for fear of her already fragile health. We now do a little tour of the neighbourhood every day. As for me, I take care of the shopping, once or twice a week.

AEIDL also keeps me very busy. As treasurer, I am in constant contact with Jean, our director, regarding the development of our financial situation. I continue to follow closely the activities of the European Network for Rural Development, as well as FARNET.

And, of course, I am following closely the development of this unprecedented crisis as well as current events in Europe – and I can say that my Europe is hurting.

The coronavirus puts the future of the European Union and the single currency at stake. Faced with the devastation it causes, how can we think that one country can cope on its own!

And yet each Member State has reacted in its own way, without coordination. Borders that were thought to have disappeared forever have been brutally closed, and in great disorder. Ridiculous competitions have been going on to beg for masks, respirators and other adapted equipment.

In France, helicopters and TGVs have criss-crossed the country, and some have even gone to Luxembourg or Germany to relieve overloaded hospitals in the Grand Est region. Why was it not the same for patients from Northern Italy or Catalonia who could have been transported to us? Our hospitals in the south of France were certainly affected, but they were able to control the situation and could perhaps have taken in people from those regions.

The Europe we love and believe in has found it very difficult to get effort to coordinate off the ground. It is true that health is not a competence of the European Union, and that's a pity! Today, however, we are of course no longer faced with this one health issue alone, but with the absolute necessity of a proactive industrial policy that allows companies to be less dependent of support. We are faced with an unprecedented crisis, with its procession of business bankruptcies, massive unemployment and major risks of a spectacular increase in precariousness and poverty. The damage is and will be immense.

Admittedly a great deal has been done in recent weeks, particularly by the European Central Bank and the Commission. But how many more Council meetings will be needed to reach an agreement on the future European budget and a recovery plan that will bring about change and, finally, genuine European solidarity?

An agreement is required that does not limit itself to a sum of compromises that are illegible and discouraging for those who believe in Europe, but which sets ambitious guidelines likely to mobilise young people, to mobilise all citizens who are active on the ground, and which will restore lustre to fundamental European values that are all too often called into question:

- Social cohesion. Tomorrow, millions of people are at risk of falling into precariousness and misery. How can we ensure that everyone in our rich continent has a minimum subsistence level, enabling every family to feed and house itself with dignity? How can we enable every territory, region and country to provide quality health services that are accessible to all?
- Solidarity. The recovery plan is going to cost a lot of money and tomorrow everyone will have to contribute. How can we prevent tax optimisation schemes from allowing companies, especially the largest ones and the giants of the new digital economy, to avoid paying taxes again? How can we bear the fact that, even within the EU, tax havens

continue to exist? Why are tax rates on labour income higher than those on capital income?

- Democracy. These problems of social and territorial cohesion and insufficient solidarity undermine our democracies. Extremists and populists, ready to offer easy solutions, are gaining ground. How sad to see that in countries, which were thought to be forever vaccinated against this scourge, such as Germany and Spain, movements are resurfacing that are reminiscent of sinister pasts? Over and above the formal condemnations, when will the Council take decisions on respect for European values? When will the European Parliament take courageous decisions? When will the major European parties, at least those that believe in Europe, expel from their ranks those who have nothing to do with it?

It is on this basis that a mobilising project could hope to restore meaning and the desire for Europe. Through its Green Deal, the Commission launched a promising path before the crisis. Billions of euros will be needed to relaunch activities and jobs. Why should this Green Deal, to which we certainly need to give even greater ambition and a much stronger social dimension, not be the backbone of a recovery plan that isn't simply a continuation of what was done before, but the construction of a new, more social and more inclusive Europe. Recovery must all take into account other 'viruses' that threaten us, especially climate change and the loss of biodiversity?

My Europe is hurting. I am thinking of the thousands of people who were on the border with Greece at the beginning of March, I am thinking of those who drowned in silence in the Mediterranean, I am thinking of the Moria camp in Lesbos and I am thinking of Syria, which is no longer talked about. Where is the Europe I love?



**Anita Cortes (Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium): "*Channelling this positive energy into serving others*"**

I have been through this COVID-19 period in two phases: the first few days, I had the anxiety of not being prepared for it, with a lot of uncertainty, while hearing on the news, the new cases day and night, the deaths, and how COVID-19 was spreading to other countries.

One Sunday evening I started to have fever, fatigue, pain everywhere and I lost my sense of smell completely. My doctor suspected a case of COVID-19, and I had to isolate myself, even inside my own house.

In the end, the illness only lasted for a few days, but it was enough to change my way of thinking. My scale of values changed, and I began to live from day to day, in a much more positive and productive way.

With the challenge of confinement, I found a way to telework more efficiently. By avoiding commuting, I freed up two to three hours of leisure time per day. I have taken up some activities online: zumba, tango and English classes. I cleaned the house thoroughly, made masks and even drew up plans for the renovation of my kitchen.

I also wondered how I could channel all this positive energy into serving others and I volunteered to go shopping for neighbours, who are lonely or in difficulty. I also used my skills to create an image of 'hope', a logo that now appears on every window in my neighbourhood...and even a 'few miles away' in Argentina.

My thoughts for the post-COVID-19 crisis? For some people, the end of confinement will simply be an opportunity to return to bad habits. But for many others, this virus will have highlighted certain key points, such as the environment, which has improved under less of our negative pressures; our vulnerability; the need to consume differently; and the need to be more supportive if we want to survive. The crisis has asked us to empathise a little more with each other, because in the end, we are not so different from each other in this kind of situation.



**Toby Johnson (Amsterdam, The Netherlands): “*This current period of Keynesian expansion will rapidly be replaced by a return to austerity*”**

Personally, as a seasoned home worker, predominant introvert, in receipt of a pension and with neither children nor parents to care for, I have been affected remarkably little by the coronavirus crisis and consequent lockdown measures. Marooned in Amsterdam, I'm free to read books, listen to the BBC's *In Our Time* archive and binge-watch TV detective series. We can go for walks and bike rides, and have seen the family a couple of times (keeping a 1½-metre distance). There are no grocery shortages, just stripes on the shop floor and Perspex screens at the tills. We have to forgo cinemas, pubs and our weekly expedition to the Balti House, a very good curry restaurant. Yesterday's *Koningsdag* was humorously converted into *Woningsdag* or *Balkoningsdag*.

But for the moment the local neighbourhood co-op has suspended activities apart from its phone helpline. It will celebrate Liberation Day through online stories.

What are the likely medium-term consequences of the crisis? How are local development precepts important?

When it all blows over, I think we can expect a number of social-economic changes to persist:

- More home working (hot-desking, non-renewal of office leases)
- Staggered school and working hours
- A swing towards online commerce
- Animated films will replace live ones
- An aversion from crowded public transport. As more commuting by car is not an option, cycling will rise
- More concern for food security (blocked international supply chains, shortage of migrant farm labour)
- A desire for more food self-sufficiency (fear of transmission from intensively farmed livestock)
- A swing to responsible and cultural tourism (dearer flights)
- More support for degrowth, but on the margins
- Fewer hugs and *bises*?

Organisationally we risk less informed debate and less democratic accountability. Annual general meetings and parliaments meeting online cannot exercise the same level of scrutiny on managers and governments. Investigative journalism is needed more than ever, but newspaper sales and advertising revenue have slumped even further.

Politically I think we shall see stronger support for solidarity-based public services, above all health services. Along with this a recognition of the essential worker status of many disrespected and underpaid professions, from nurses to bus drivers and street cleaners, and an upward re-evaluation of the value of immigrants, who ensure public services and food supply ([MAX project](#)).

But I doubt that we will see a fundamental change in power relationships. Just as with the financial crisis of 2007-08 this current period of Keynesian expansion will rapidly be replaced by a return to austerity. Already it is benefiting billionaires disproportionately (Amazon, Netflix).

It's the perfect time to move to a universal basic income (UBI), which would not only reduce poverty but open up scope for myriad local voluntary initiatives. Some of these might be developed into community enterprises - for instance in urban horticulture or bike couriers. Platform co-ops will come into their own to support and connect microenterprises. AEIDL needs to find and promote the best ways of supporting transnational distance networking ([ESF-TP](#)).

Employment Commissioner Nicolas Schmit has just written to EU member states [recommending increased support for the social economy](#), so the political cog wheels are starting to turn.



**Katalin Kolosy (Les Pechs du Vers, France): “The choice between resilience and abstinence?”**

In France, the health crisis has led to total lockdown between 15 March and 11 May 2020. No schools, no shops and no services other than those deemed essential have been also to stay running. We are only allowed to go out to fetch some groceries or walk the dog in the immediate vicinity.

As a newly retired senior woman, the impact on my daily life is minor, although I miss my gym course and the taiji chuan practice! My companion is teleworking as a consultant in the evaluation field, and for him the only difference is that steering committee meetings with clients are now organised online.

In our rural area, the COVID-19 crisis has been less pronounced than in big cities, and our hospitals have been less overrun.

In reality, at this time of year when nature is unfolding, this lockdown is not a real constraint to us as there is so much to be done in the vegetable garden. This year we decided to optimise our food autonomy by growing more. Home grown radish, tarragon, winter carrots, lettuce are already part of our daily food bowl. Soon strawberries, potatoes, beans, turnips, tomatoes, and aubergines will arrive.

We are very lucky to have enough room to do all this; we can also rely upon a robust network of friends and neighbours with whom we can exchange organic seeds and cutting, while social distancing, of course!

We also use WhatsApp to get news from friends and family at a distance, and it works quite well. That said, we truly miss the friendly atmosphere of the community café and meals between friends... Rural areas can quickly turn into social deserts!

But here, the 'local community' is no idle concept and it is clearly apparent that genuine solidarity is being shown towards the elderly and those most isolated. This is very reassuring for the future!

For instance, given that all market places were closed, the local community got together with the mayor, the community café and local producers (many of whom are young organic farmers setting up in agriculture). In a few weeks' time we hope to open a small direct-selling hub offering bread, cooked meals, fresh vegetable, cheese and other produce, every Tuesday from 4pm to 7pm. Orders are placed by phone messages and collections are made at the community café. This is the place where everyone checks if anyone is need of care, with a lot of goodwill and kindness, despite the unfriendly nature of masked faces!

Of course, this slow and sober pace of life intensifies our reflections on geopolitics and societal values. We follow on television and social media some of the important debates on how to transform our socio-economic models. It is not easy to avoid grim visions with recession and unemployment looming and leading to the inevitable rise of poverty all over the world, including in the richest places of the EU...

How could we turn income reduction into acceptable sobriety? Contemporary models such as the circular economy or short supply chains definitely are part of the solution. But the global economy is

deeply shaken and there is a lot to be said about public-private partnerships in the health and sanitary sector... The aircraft industry is collapsing which is bad news for our region (Toulouse has Airbus factories and a constellation of small clusters around it), but offers a serious window of opportunity to reduce our carbon footprint... Do we really have the choice between resilience and abstinence?

The 'universal income' model is also an interesting option, but difficult to implement, particularly in countries showing democratic deafness...

My belief is that tomorrow will bring novelties of all sorts, good and bad; there is hope for viable local responses and sustainable citizen-led initiatives to reach sufficient critical mass and the mainstream of policymaking. Isn't it precisely one of goals at AEIDL: advocating policies that support sustainable and local development initiatives to provide a bridge between citizens and the EU?



**Márta Márczis (Etyek, Hungary): “Democracy has been weakened by the extraordinary governmental measures taken in some European countries”**

My COVID-19 life started at the end of March; my husband and I spent two weeks in home quarantine because of my last international trip. After landing, the police registered us at the airport and a policeman informed me that people in quarantine cannot request doctor's help prior to having a high fever. At our home quarantine we were checked by the police every day, some of the policemen were nice, while others were quite aggressive. We had to communicate with the municipality every day, while they checked that we are at home. But thanks to their local approach, they asked us about our shopping needs. We also became aware of the many local grassroots helpers that were active in this village of around 5,000 inhabitants.

Following these quarantine weeks, Etyek, our village near Budapest, which is popular visitor attraction, closed to prevent city-dwellers coming to take the fresh air here and posing a risk to local people. We can go out for basic shopping, to ride the bike and to play tennis, but staying at home represented a huge change for me.

The Hungarian government invests much energy into political communication around the pandemic. At the end of March, initiated by the government the Parliament approved extraordinary changes decreasing democratic decision-making procedures ostensibly for the duration of the crisis. A spokesperson said that the changes that prove to be effective will not be undone even after the pandemic. The Hungarian strategy was to slow down the spread of the virus by restricting services and freedom in movement until the hospitals become better prepared to receive patients. They vacated more than 30,000 normal hospital beds for potential coronavirus patients by sending home those suffering from other illnesses. All hospitals are under military supervision. After this six-week preparatory period, most of the restrictions have now been lifted, except in Budapest and the central region. Around 11.5% of cases diagnosed with COVID-19 have died in Hungary, while of the more than 3,000 infected cases around 20% have recovered. However, data is centralised and limited.

We are living through a very sad moment in history that is creating much loss in our societies. We are experiencing rapid changes to our daily life and are reminded of how vulnerable our societies are, and how democracy has been weakened by the extraordinary governmental measures taken in some European countries. Day to day, we are living with the pressing question of how we personally and how our societies can adjust to the new reality?

But we also have to see the good. Pollution has decreased with a positive impact on the climate and the environment, underlining the message that a green world can still be created. We are

also seeing the creativeness of the human spirit to meet the challenges that we face along with daily acts of quiet heroism. People have shown a great willingness to help, to sustain communities and cultural life, and to just bring simple kindness to those that are isolated. We are learning how virtual technologies can help prevent unnecessary travel, shopping trips and many other time- and energy-consuming activities. The absent physical reality of others – the distance from our family members, colleagues, friends and acquaintances – reminds us of the importance of our relationships. People are relearning the centrality of their neighbourhoods, which play such a key pastoral role in such situations.

I read many after-COVID-19 scenarios of how the lessons learned for the pandemic will be used for positive changes. But I am sure that significant changes will not automatically come. It is part of human nature to forget the conclusions of bad historical moments and continue to make the same mistakes. Even so, I see an opportunity that the above positive factors will highlight the value of local action and social innovation, and open the way for greening the big systems, and all these will help rebuild Europe and make it stronger after the pandemic. To this end, we all need to store up intellectual and spiritual energy during the lockdown days to be proactive in forming our personal future and be ready to join those who represent a more sustainable approach and work towards long-term socioeconomic change.



**Marco Milano (Turin, Italy): “A turning point for building a more sustainable future”**

Italy is one of the countries most affected by the virus. It was one of the first countries that had to deal with their own frailties and unpreparedness. One of the countries that paid the highest price of under investment or, if you prefer, ‘savings’ in the healthcare system. The lockdown suddenly became the only possible option, so in my region for tow months now everything has changed.

We stopped going to the office, to school in the case of my daughters, and there were no more meetings with relatives and friends, no more dining in restaurants, no more trips to the cinema and not even more outdoor walks. Nevertheless, we relatively quickly got used to these changes. Smart working, online lessons, video calls, homemade food, which obviously Italians are very proud of, became the solutions. Aside from the obesity at the end of the quarantine, we have adapted quite well.

Personally, I am struck by the suffering that this period of time has brought. It is an enormous pain that the numbers cannot justly describe. And I don't like being helpless. On the other hand, I believe that this situation will lead our society to rethink its values. My family have taken advantage of this time to be more united, greatly reducing the background noise that accompanied our chaotic lives before the virus.

We have lost the references. Aristotle said, “Man is a social animal”, and social distancing is a violence that will leave a mark, even a wound. The distrust of others worries me, even in perspective. Certainly, the impact on the economy and on the labour market will also be very serious. But I want to imagine the ‘after’ also as a time in which we will be able to benefit from what we have learned: that we are not invulnerable, and we must work to protect us and the planet on which we live; and that we should not take anything for granted, starting with proximity to others. I consider this current shock as a turning point for building a more sustainable future.



**Enrique Nieto (Brussels, Belgium): *“Teleworking culture and the fear of future pandemics may become the impetus for rural development”***

Just as for many of you, the coronavirus crisis came as a complete surprise. Of course, I had read about how this new respiratory virus has caused the Chinese city of Wuhan to shut down for two months, but it was not until it started knocking on the doors of our ‘safe’ European continent that I began to acknowledge the imminence of the danger. The realisation of the entire scale and gravity of the situation, however, came only after the decision to close all European borders for the first time since the WWII the and when the general public was ordered to stay home.

Similar to the stages of grief defined by the Kübler-Ross model, first came the denial, then anger... then acceptance. There was nothing left, but to accept the new reality and to try to turn it to my advantage. This is how my dining table suddenly and swiftly became my only workspace.

The first and most obvious advantage of staying home is that finally, after so many months of daunting bureaucratic formalities and being separated from each other by thousands of miles, my Armenian wife and I are now able to enjoy each other’s presence for 24 hours (even though we have had to cancel our wedding that was planned for July in Spain).

Also, I have discovered that thanks to modern technology, I can be as efficient working from home as from the office. I believe work culture is something that will change significantly, once the crisis is behind us. Teleworking has the potential to become the new modus operandi for many individuals and companies since it offers numerous benefits, such as decreased office expenses, less crowded public transport, reduced number of cars and emission levels and greater flexibility for employees to choose where to live (vicinity to office becomes less important).

Indeed, this new work culture may encourage people to leave busy city centres for suburbs and even rural areas. Moving to big cities will no longer be viewed as an opportunity for a better life, since it will more widely accepted that the same work can be carried out from any location. Teleworking culture, in particular, and the fear of future pandemics, in general, may themselves become the impetus for rural development. In the case of the former, there will be less enthusiasm for moving to big cities in order to find a better job, while for the latter, being locked down in a house in the country with a garden is more appealing than being confined to an apartment. Besides, overcrowded city centres carry a greater risk of infection. One can argue that the ongoing confinement measures adopted by governments across the world are more suitable for urban areas than rural areas that are less densely populated and the risk of the contagion spreading is lower.

Such opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic do not take away from its serious consequences, the full extent of which we will be able to assess only in the future. Nevertheless, we can say that the virus will be an impact beyond its health and economic impact.

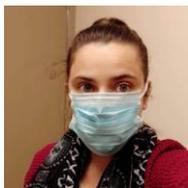
One of the major negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the growing level of isolation in society. Immediate human communication is suffering the most, and we are yet to see the long-term psychological of less physical intimacy. These days people, quite understandably, are trying to avoid each other in public places, sending suspicious looks to those not respecting social distancing rules. Whether this is a temporary phenomenon or a long-term behavioural pattern, only time will tell.

Public solidarity is another interesting phenomenon. Despite the existence of a general positive attitude towards medical personnel and other professionals providing essential services, the pandemic seems to have made us less susceptible to the needs of those of the most vulnerable,

such as the poor, refugees and those living in conflict zones. Our attention has been monopolised by our families and loved ones, but we should not forget that our families are part of a larger society, which needs interaction, cooperation and sense of solidarity to ensure its continued existence. This cooperation must take place on both a national and international level. The image of Europe, and the European Union in particular, has been damaged by the crisis, and we must wait to see how well it recovers its reputation and values of open borders and solidarity among Member States.

Once the European peak of infections is behind us, I believe heated discussions on the EU's existential crisis will take place. Too many questions remain unanswered, especially those concerning assistance to the most affected Member States. The pandemic has emphasised the divide between the northern and southern EU countries and the diminishing solidarity among them. The lack of support given to Italy and Spain raises as many questions as those about the lack of countries' preparedness to face a major emergency.

COVID-19 will surely make the governments in the EU and elsewhere review and reassess many of their approaches and priorities. We already know that in the coming decades humanity will be facing a heightened risk of such pandemics and natural disasters. This will undoubtedly change the perception of what constitutes an imminent threat. However, time will tell whether we will witness more international cooperation on common dangers or whether countries will adopt isolationist positions, such as those that some have taken to the coronavirus crisis.



**Anabel Nava Tazo (Brussels, Belgium): “A unique moment to reinvent our economy”**

The day starts with a cup of coffee, so it is not much different from a regular day – except for the fact that we get to avoid traffic jams and morning crowds in the metro, which is actually quite nice.

We are lucky to have the kind of work that can be done remotely. Sure, it is harder to have regular updated information from colleagues, but we have the chance of being able to fully continue our activities with just some adjustments.

Nonetheless, the constant changes and the high level of uncertainty are a little bit demotivating. We were clearly not ready for this, and things seem to change from one day to the next. This makes achieving good short-term results quite complicated, and a lot of work is 'lost' in the process of finding the best possible outcome in accordance with the new situation.

This is a new challenge for everyone, and we will have to learn how to adapt not only our work methods, but our daily routines and activities. Personally, I would expect this crisis to help people be nicer and show more kindness to one another. Try to put oneself in the other's shoes and little by little get to reach higher social justice levels.

I read that something is wrong with the economic system that collapses when we consume only what is necessary. And yet, we seem unable to understand that change requires all of us to become aware and act, even if that means losing a tiny bit of our comfortable entourage of goodies and leisure items.

I think we have a unique moment (perhaps the only one we will have) to end our non-sustainable consumption and behavioural patterns, and reinvent our economy. Difficult? Sure. Impossible? I honestly hope not.