



The Great Reset: what COVID-19 means for Europe

European View
2020, Vol. 19(2) 119–121
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DOI: 10.1177/1781685820979057
journals.sagepub.com/home/evv



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COVID-19 has profoundly impacted Europe in the past months. Battling the multiple waves of this pandemic, all EU member states have faced many challenges. Simultaneously, the EU has had to grapple with long-standing trends in the world—both those that have intensified and those that have remained unchanged since the outbreak of the virus but are still pressing. We do not know when the crisis will be over, and yet we must face the consequences of the pandemic and learn its lessons.

This issue of the *European View* reflects on the time of the COVID-19 pandemic up until now: the challenges that the EU and countries around the world have faced in this time of crisis, and the lessons that can be drawn from these challenges. Before I highlight the analyses and conclusions of the expert contributors to this issue, I will share some of my personal insights on how the pandemic has reshaped Europe, how it has highlighted new priorities and new challenges, and the lessons we can draw from the EU's response to the crisis thus far.

Since the pandemic struck Europe in March of this year, it has disrupted the world as we know it. It has made us aware that we are all fundamentally vulnerable, whether rich, poor, old or young, and that this is equally true in all EU member states. The ensuing crisis revealed that the future of work is already here. In various sectors, a widespread transition to working from home took place to limit the spread of COVID-19, and ensured many people kept their jobs during the crisis. Furthermore, challenges in battling the pandemic brought to light the need to reduce the West's dependency on China when it comes to, for example, the pharmaceutical industry and technology. Each of these changed paradigms underscores the fact that we ought to invest in a fundamentally different post-COVID Europe, rather than restoring Europe to mirror pre-COVID times.

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The EU, after the pandemic, ought to have learned from the challenges it has faced during the crisis. One of the major lessons the pandemic has taught us is that we need to think globally, but act locally, relying on effective cooperation. Solidarity and subsidiarity remain the basic pillars of the EU and should be highly regarded under any circumstances. Furthermore, we need to reform decision-making in order to make decisions faster and more effectively in the future, especially in those areas which are best dealt with at the EU level, such as foreign policy, defence, security and the most pressing elements of irregular migration. Additionally, we need to learn from COVID-19's sudden detrimental economic impact by implementing structural reforms to our national economies, based on digitisation, automation, robotisation and AI. To achieve this, we need to build an effective and relevant infrastructure. Providing structural reforms and promoting the EU's values will make for a strong and durable post-COVID-19 EU.

The expert contributors to this issue of the *European View* each reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for the EU. Their articles propose directions for effective responses in future crises, strengthened relationships with other states and regions, and a durable approach to long-term challenges.

Multiple articles in this edition of the *European View* argue that COVID-19 could serve as an opportunity for positive change in the EU. Margherita Movarelli, for instance, argues that it could have beneficial effects for EU democracy. Her article discusses how the pandemic has weakened populist forces in the EU and emphasises the importance of good communication between the EU and its citizens. Eva Palacková sees the crisis as having created momentum for ensuring the EU's recovery benefits the environment as well. Goran Bandov focuses on Croatia's EU Presidency in the first half of 2020, discussing the challenges it faced due to the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 and highlighting the achievements of the term despite these challenges. Constantine Arvanitopoulos reflects on how the pandemic has changed transatlantic relations and explores the possible benefits of strengthening cooperation on common challenges.

Other contributors to this issue consider the possible outcomes of the pandemic. Pepijn Bergsen notes that a trend towards a more protective state is emerging across both Europe and the political spectrum, and argues that the crisis caused by the pandemic represents a turning point. Salome Samadashvili presents the idea of a post-COVID-19 Europe that emerges stronger from the crisis on the condition that it addresses the institutional gaps that inhibited a successful initial response to the pandemic. Henri Vanhanen proposes in his article that the Finnish tradition of ensuring supplies for emergencies could serve as the model for an EU-level security of supply, making Europe better prepared for future crises. The article by Nad'a Kovalčíková and Ariane Tabatabai draws lessons from the infodemic that arose as a result of the pandemic and provides clear proposals for how states can respond to the disinformation threat now and in the post-COVID-19 EU.

COVID-19 has also deeply impacted developments outside of the EU, as well as the Union's relationships with other states and regions. The article by Héli Slim reflects on electoral processes on the African continent during the pandemic and the consequences of

their outcomes for EU–African Union relations and elections elsewhere in the world. Magnus Norell analyses the effect of the pandemic on the Middle East and North Africa region. He concludes that the conflicts in the region that preceded the outbreak of the virus remain ever present, and will therefore continue to affect Europe for the foreseeable future. Nikolaos Tzifakis looks at the emergency measures implemented in the Western Balkan countries and concludes that the ease with which the region’s leaders limited the checks on their power could be a cause for concern. Andrew Glencross examines the possibility of the negotiation of a UK–EU health-security relationship and argues that the politicisation of health security problematises the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship.

While the pandemic has left a significant mark on Europe and beyond, it has not halted other developments that are not directly affected by the crisis. Garvan Walshe analyses recent and pre-COVID-19 shifts on the world stage and argues that there is a more active role for the EU to play in ensuring security in its neighbourhood through the development of a unified strategic culture. Eloïse Ryon proposes the extension of the concept of strategic autonomy to the European energy sector. And Richard Whitman shows that EU–UK foreign, defence and security policy has been neglected in Brexit negotiations.

The conclusions of the authors in this issue of the *European View* not only highlight the problems that the EU faces during the COVID-19 outbreak, but also offer us a glimpse of the challenges that member states will have to cope with in post-pandemic times. They signal that the issues of self-sufficiency and reforms to critical infrastructure and political decision-making will take centre stage, and offer clear directions for an EU that is able to withstand future crises.

Author biography



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