



Università  
degli Studi di  
Messina



## SECOND TAORMINA/MESSINA CONFERENCE<sup>1</sup>

18<sup>TH</sup> – 21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2021

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD  
(ORGANIZED BY VISION AND TAOBUK FESTIVAL)

LA METAMORFOSI DI EUROPA<sup>2</sup>

THE MANIFESTO AND CONFERENCE FOLLOW UP



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<sup>1</sup> The first day of the three days conference was hosted by the University of Messina. We thank the Rector, Professor Salvatore Cuzzocrea, the Pro Rector, Professor Giovanni Moschella, the faculty and the staff for the support. We are particularly thankful to Marcella Darigo and Paolo Maria Nosedà for the translation services.

<sup>2</sup> Europa is the mythological Phoenician princess whose seduction from JOVIS gave birth to the kingdom of CRETE and to the idea of the WEST as civilization.

## MANIFESTO AND CONCLUSIONS FOR FURTHER DEBATES

The Second Messina/Taormina Conference “THE METAMORFOSI OF EUROPE” co-organized by Vision (the Think Tank) and Taobuk (The Taormina Book Festival) has taken place in the very days while the continent was trying to achieve a new form of normality with a strong acceleration of the vaccination campaign to mitigate the still-ongoing pandemic.

The COVID19 had triggered the greatest crisis since 1945. And yet, like all previous global crises, it is not only greatly accelerating pre-existing technology-driven mutations, but it has also created the opportunity of a radical rethinking of how we govern complex societies, the world and the European Union itself.

The European Union is, indeed, changing at a pace which has never been experienced before: the European Central Bank has gone even beyond the unconventional measures experimented at the time of the sovereign debt crisis in 2015 by pumping into the financial markets more than 1 Trillion euro in the 9 months from April to December 2020 and this pushed interest rates so low to help member States easily to finance extraordinary financial rescue packages<sup>3</sup>; political priorities were drastically twisted towards an ambitious “green deal” and bold targets to reduce EU CO2 emissions of 55% vis-à-vis by 2030 (and this result may, indeed, have been accelerated by the increased awareness that much threatened global disasters can indeed happen and touch everybody’s life); the decision to finance with the European Commission’s own resources the 750 billion euro “Next Generation EU” is being increasingly seen as permanent change which will affect the nature of the Union and this will eventually modify the stability and growth pact that constrains national fiscal policies.

However, we still see the glass as half full when talking with whoever is still preaching nationalism, but also as half empty when debating amongst the ones who really care about the greatest political project of the twentieth century. A lot is being achieved and yet the EU needs more: it needs objectives and decision-making mechanisms which can bring a great 20<sup>th</sup> century project into the new century.

Moreover, the pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in what Europeans thought was their main strength. Despite believing that they live in the portion of the globe that enjoys the highest quality of life, the most developed welfare and some of the best health-care systems, in fact many European countries – notably Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Sweden, Hungary and the Netherlands – have been amongst the worst hit in terms of casualties and cases, and now have to face a huge welfare burden with weakened public finances.

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<sup>3</sup> The de facto permanent change into ECB’s policies was eventually formalized with Christine Lagarde’s recommendation to change the policy targets of ECB.

History teaches that after the global wars of the twentieth century, new “world orders” have been crafted. We believe that the time has similarly come for a new start. Sixty-five years ago it was a conference in Messina to decide the creation of the institutions (the EEC and the EURATOM) which paved the way to the Rome treaty. In June 2021, the think-tank Vision, TAOBUK and University of Messina convened a three-days’ problem solving event in Messina and Taormina where thirty intellectuals, policy makers, journalists, historians and visionaries gathered to generate and discuss bold ideas which could feed the parallel and official “conference on the future of Europe” and provide a contribution to “crafting the future” (as for the Vision logo).

The conference is meant to be the second of a series (begun in October 2020) which will feed institutions with fresh ideas on how to renew the European Union. The ten propositions which we believe are worthwhile to be developed and pushed forward are:

1. The Messina-Taormina conference warmly welcomed the great advancement that the European Union has achieved in less than one year since the agreement at the European Council in July 2020 on Next Generation EU. Old taboos have thereby been thrown away and new visions have been created. However, we need to complete the awakening by establishing new priorities, defining more efficient decision-making processes, completing the many half-way integrations (single market, free circulation of people, monetary union) which create instabilities especially during crises.
2. Amongst the priorities which will define the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one must be the setting of clear, decisive European policies on global digital platforms. The working group which was convened to discuss a Vision concept paper believes that European policy makers, like the US or Chinese ones, are still facing a conceptual issue of how to better define the problem, which is crucial if the right regulation instruments are themselves to be defined. Antitrust tools may be technically not adequate to tackle a question which is mostly about control and access to data. GDPR is seen as a very interesting example of an innovative EU policy tool; however an effort must be made to make individuals and small firms instrumental in its reinforcement.
3. The conference also recommends that – alongside the regulation of existing digital platforms – policies should be pursued to unleash the creative and entrepreneurial potential of European existing firms and start-ups. This implies a number of strategic choices: to push forward towards a more streamlined common market where competition can select innovators capable to reach a global scale; to reduce burden which protect incumbents and prevent new actors to emerge (for instance in Fintech); to use public – private partnerships to promote new kind of platforms, whereas decentralization, interoperability, open standard can become competitive advantages.

4. The Messina/ Taormina conference thinks it is already time to take a stance on how the Next Generation EU and individual national recovery and resilience plans are being designed. The entire initiative will be successful only if it will transform itself into a permanent capacity of the European Commission to issue common debt which will finance a European autonomous financial capacity to respond to crises.
5. The conference urges that mechanisms of the next NGEU be reviewed so that future successor “recovery and resilience” plans achieve a much greater involvement of civil society (so that the plans become proper projects meant to reform entire societies) and mobilize much more private funds. Instruments that realize public – private partnerships may also work as a mean to solve the problem public administrations have in effective execution of such plans.
6. The pandemic suddenly reminded the Europeans that the healthcare and welfare systems they have been very proud of are fragile vis-à-vis modern challenges such as global pandemics. The working group on healthcare believes that the European member states need to urgently tackle review the case for giving the European Commission an institutionalized role in coordinating healthcare systems or at least coordinating responses when pandemic outbreak. An area of free circulation of people without such a co-ordination may make it more difficult to contain the damage from health threats that are borderless.
7. European healthcare systems need, however, an organization overhaul even when assessed on national basis. On one hand, we need much more capability to be close to individuals and families so that more diseases can be prevented rather than treated; on the other, hospitals may need to move from a “one-fit-all” model to a more specialized one. Technologies enable both tendencies and the European Commission is encouraged to continue to provide added value in terms of promoting the change and benchmarking examples to be followed. New and mounting inequalities must be closely monitored so that the pillar of universal coverage is enhanced.
8. One of the plenary sessions of the conference provided the opportunity to attempt a link between the NGEU intervention logic and cohesion policies. Regional aids account for almost one-third of the EC budget and yet their impact appears to be not as strong as it used to be. The extension to cohesion policies of the NGEU principle of paying Member States (or Regions) only upon “fulfilment of targets and milestones” may be considered.
9. The conference also dedicated two plenary sessions to what promised to be a permanent feature of the Messina / Taormina conference: drafting new or

strengthening existing positive actions to develop a European demos: these include the possibility to make Erasmus free for all students at secondary and tertiary education level; deliberate policies to increase the quality and quantity of Europe wide debates; and new mechanisms to encourage EU wide mechanisms of participatory democracy will become more specific proposals for the conference on the future of Europe (and partnerships with other think tanks and universities will be pursued).

10. Africa will also be a distinctive focus of the next edition of the Messina/ Taormina conference. It is for Africa after all where pragmatically European foreign common policy patterns must be most urgently found.

*The Messina/Taormina conference was the opportunity to discuss and generate some bold ideas on the Future of Europe. Participants in the conference believe that the conclusions of the Manifesto are worthy of further development and for proposal to the European institutions, though they do not necessarily agree with every finding and recommendation. Participants join the Vision series of conferences on Europe in their individual, not institutional, capacities.*

The conference participants included: Francesco Grillo (Director Vision think tank), Bill Emmott (Author of “The fate of the West” and former editor of The Economist), Stefania Giannini (Assistant Director for Education, UNESCO and former Minister for Universities, Research and Education in Italy), Antonella Ferrara (President and Founder Taobuk - Taormina International Book Festival), Alberto Bramanti (Professor of Regional Economics, Bocconi University), Alexandra Borchardt (Head of Digital Journalism Fellowship Hamburg Media School, Senior Research Associate, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford), Alexandra Geese (MEP, Alliance 90/ The Greens), Alfio Puglisi (King’s College London), Angela Giuffrida (Rome correspondent for The Guardian and The Observer), Antonio Nicita (Principal Adviser European Commission, Member of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board), Antonio Parenti (Capo della rappresentanza della Commissione Europea in Italia), Antonio Tajani (President of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament), Cosimo Pacciani (Senior Advisory Board Member, International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence, UNESCO and former Chief Risk Officer at European Stability Mechanism), Demir Murat Seyrek (European Foundation for Democracy), Elvira Amata (Presidente Commissione Statuto ARS), Enrico Giovannini (Minister of sustainable infrastructures and mobility), Ernest Wilson (Former Dean of Annenberg School of Communication in LA and Director of the USC center for Third Space thinking), Fabio Masini (Jean Monnet Chair for European Economic Governance, Roma Tre, Secretary of the European Federalist Movement), Francesca Pellegrino (Università degli Studi di Messina – docente di Diritto della Navigazione), Francesco Bonfiglio (Chief Executive Officer GAIA-X), Francesco Lapenta (Institute of Future and Innovation Studies. John Cabot University, Rome), Gavin Hewitt (Former Chief Correspondent for Europe, BBC), Giacomo D’Amico (Università degli Studi di Messina - Docente di Diritto Costituzionale), Giorgia Meloni (President of the

European Conservatives and Reformists Party), Hannah Lucinda Smith (Times, Correspondent for Turkey and the Balkans), Jan Piotrowski (Business Editor The Economist), John Hooper (Italy and Vatican correspondent of The Economist), John F. Ryan (Director Public Health, Commissione Europea, DG Health and Food Safety), Kalypto Nikolaidis (St Antony's College, University of Oxford), Kelly Falconer (Asia Literary Agency), Koert Debeuf (Director of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Europe and Editor in Chief, EUobserver), Laura Silvia Battaglia (Journalist, freelance contributor The Washington Post), Lorenzo Fioramonti (Italy's MP and Former Minister of Universities, Schools and Research), Luca Jahier (Former President of the European Economic and Social Committee), Lucrezia Reichlin (Professor London Business School), Marco Berlinguer (Researcher Institut de govern i polítiques públiques (IGOP), Manuel Vilas (Columnist El Mundo and El PAIS), Maria Cristina Messa (Italy's Minister for Universities and Research), Maria Letizia Giorgetti (Professore Associato Università degli Studi di Milano), Mario Nava (European Commission DG REFORM – Director General), Michele Geraci (Professore di pratica della politica economica alla Nottingham University di Ningbo), Michele Messina (Professore Associato Diritto dell'Unione Europea Università degli Studi di Messina), Mikel Landabaso (Director of Growth and Innovation at the Joint Research Center of the European Commission), Nicola Saldutti (Corriere della Sera), Paolo Gentiloni (European Commissioner for Economy), Paul Nemitz (Data Ethics Commission, Global Council on Extended Intelligence), Raffaele Stancanelli (Eurodeputato Gruppo ECR, Vicepresidente Commissione Iuri), Roberto Castaldi (Associate Professors Università Ecampus and General Editor Euractiv Italia), Romano Prodi (Former Prime Minister of Italy and Former President of the European Commission), Ruggero Aricò (Vice Presidente di Confindustria Assafrica & Mediterraneo), Sandro Gozi (Former Prime Minister of Italy and Former President of the European Commission), Stefania Baroncelli (Professor Public and European Union Law at Free University of Bozen-Bolzano), Stefano Campostrini (Professore ordinario Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Steven Everts (Senior Advisor on strategy and communications at the European External Action Service), Viviana Mazza (Journalist, Corriere della Sera), Yang Lin (WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development).

The Manifesto used as an input the plenary sessions and below reports from the three Working Groups on

1. **Working Group 1:** Democratically accountable global digital platforms as the European approach to the battle for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
2. **Working Group 2:** Next generation EU and completing the EU Hamiltonian moment
3. **Working Group 3:** Europe as a Laboratory for transnational policies and ideas to save liberal democracies

Attached you find the reports of the Working Groups.

#### **WORKING GROUP 1. DEMOCRATICALLY ACCOUNTABLE GLOBAL DIGITAL PLATFORMS AS THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO THE BATTLE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> The background to the WG was VISION concept paper and the conclusions of the 2020 Taormina Conference on global digital platform accessible here [https://www.thinktank.vision/images/2020/Taormina\\_conference/WG/WG1\\_conclusions\\_.pdf](https://www.thinktank.vision/images/2020/Taormina_conference/WG/WG1_conclusions_.pdf)

Coordinators: Alexandra Geese (MEP, Alliance 90/ The Greens); Jan Piotrowski (The Economist, Business Editor); Francesco Grillo (Vision)

The future belongs to global digital platforms. That sentiment is as commonplace, in Europe and elsewhere, as it is vague and uninterrogated. However, you define these multisided marketplaces, which act as conduits for data flows and virtual points of contact between physical networks, of commerce, information or interpersonal relationships, one thing is clear to European policymakers: as Justice Potter Stewart did with obscenity, they know it when they see it. And what they see is American and Chinese.

## **THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

Of course, Europeans have access to non-European platforms, just as they can buy a Japanese car or an Argentine steak. European merchants sell to European shoppers on Amazon. European companies advertise to European consumers on Google and Facebook. European teenagers follow European influencers series on Tik Tok. And in a world where trade were free, globalisation on the march and competition thriving, that might be enough.

Nationality should, thus, not matter. The concern would be more about the creation by platforms of dominant positions which are, in fact, bringing us to a scenario which is the opposite to the one that the Internet promised in the first place thanks to its very characteristics of being a decentralized network. It is about a huge concentration of information and, thus, power and the impact of this is being seen across different industrial sectors (whereas old monopolies and traditional antitrust policies were meant to be mostly by industry) and different human activities (including politics).

And yet protectionist sentiments resurface, nation states reassert their power and the nationality of the platforms begins to matter. They are the 21st-century equivalent—as the Vision paper suggests—of the roads, railways and ports that helped fuel the great industrial revolutions of the past. Just as transport infrastructure enabled goods and ideas to flow between 19th-century factories, the platforms channel data, the modern day's most valuable resource, to their most productive uses.

As one participant reminded “it may still be true that GAFAM (the acronym under which Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft) may represent a rather small percentage of global GDP and global corporate revenues and yet it controls the access to a much higher percentage of data. If data is going to drive 80% of the added value on products and services in the economy by 2030, the equation is quite straightforward to call for action<sup>5</sup> (and,

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<sup>5</sup> As an example, one of the largest projects actually in the automotive field is called Catena-X, where BMW, Daimler, VW have decided to share their data to build in their cars; if these data will not be stored and managed within a EU technology platform, the risk is that the intellectual property of a big part of the future product value may be lost.

indeed, this is confirmed by the astronomical market capitalization that are supposed to discount future value<sup>6</sup>”.

That makes it jarring that the definition of the problem to be solved—and even something so seemingly fundamental as defining what a global digital platform really is<sup>7</sup>—remains deeply muddled among stakeholders.

From the Taormina/Messina workshop, it emerges that Europeans resigned to using non-European platforms have five main concerns. Foreign platforms:

1. could in principle cut off access to their services (and some may argue for a quasi-utility approach to services which are increasingly considered quasi-public);
2. they - certainly Chinese ones and potentially even those from America - could facilitate the pilfering of European intellectual property;
3. may be stifling European businesses that rely on them, or preventing rival European platforms from emerging (as we already mentioned);
4. could reflect, by default if not by design, the values of their home countries, which can, as with American turbo capitalism or Chinese authoritarianism, look inimical to Europe’s human-centric and rights-oriented values;
5. lastly, global digital platforms are relevant to public goods like healthcare, but also can create the conditions in which democracy itself comes under threat.

None of these worries is new. However, the global<sup>8</sup> nature and reach of the platforms has amplified greatly opportunities and threats. They have been interconnected and they are reinforcing each other.

## **FIRST ELEMENTS FOR PROBLEM SOLVING**

Vis-à-vis these perceptions Europe has, in theory, three possibilities:

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<sup>6</sup> It is enough to count AMAZON (whose market cap is smaller than APPLE and Microsoft) to have a market value higher than the entire Frankfurt Stock Exchange (the largest EU stock exchange where all major German manufacturers, car makers, banks and chemical companies are listed).

<sup>7</sup> Some of the participants suggest the term “new techno-infrastructures” which may better reflect the fact that the new infrastructures require certain characteristics (flexibility, federated nature, resilience, etc.) that coincide with the principles of the “Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-Based Digital Government at the ministerial meeting during the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 8 December 2020”.

<sup>8</sup> Some argue that none of these platforms is, however, truly global. In fact, most of American ones are hard to access from China and viceversa.



1. the first is to design and promote globally an action capable to apply to data infrastructures the same original paradigm of the internet that started as a decentralized communication network;
2. the second is to “at least save Europe” which also would mean to deliberately (and more or less explicitly) “protect” our own territory (as other countries have done when strategic interests are involved);
3. the third is to become a standard setter for digital regulation as may already happened with GDPR.

The choice between the two approaches is not only intellectual but also political<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the EU is using (or should use) three important policy levers: regulations of existing platforms; innovation policies meant to foster the participation of European companies to competition for digital leadership (so that markets become less concentrated); principles and incentives to promote technological solutions which may be consistent with EU objectives.

The three levers are, obviously, interconnected and their success largely depends on their internal consistency.

## **REGULATIONS AND WHOM DO WE WANT TO PROTECT?**

The EU has so far focused on regulating the existing platforms and – even more tellingly – the approach has still been largely about trusting a “law based” approach (which is not the only possible option, although it is certainly the one we would expect from an institution like the EU).

This has worked to an extent. The Global Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is an illustration of the “Brussels effect”, whereby companies align their global practices on how to process personal data<sup>10</sup> with rules set for the EU, the world’s largest market of wealthy consumers. European data-protection rules have indeed been transposed in many countries and they even inspired American and British<sup>11</sup> jurisdictions.

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<sup>9</sup> Although somebody may argue that this one of those vital questions which challenge traditional dichotomy between right/ conservatives and left/ progressives.

<sup>10</sup> The EU distinguishes “personal data” (meaning by that “any information relation to an identified or identifiable natural person”) from non-personal and open data.

<sup>11</sup> The Brussels effect seems to have had an impact even across the British Channel and beyond the BREXIT: the new digital markets unit within the Competition authority and the draft “Bill on Online Safety” appear to reflect some of the European choices.

That said, it is unclear how successfully European regulations are being or will be enforced.

The effects of GDPR may not manifest themselves fully until the platforms' pre-GDPR data hauls become outdated and lose their value, which could take another few years. And even perfect enforcement may prove ineffectual and, worse, put up bigger barriers for upstart European platforms than for the incumbent foreign giants, which can afford large compliance departments stuffed with well-paid lawyers and which treat even billion-euro fines as a modest cost of doing business. Last but not least, the very "natural persons" may not be aware of their new rights and may not function as a powerful ally to force compliance. Simplification may here be very useful and the experimentations of different methods to make the GDPR more "user friendly" may be assessed.

Slightly different considerations may be applied to the on-going process of drafting the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA).

Politics and multilateralism are the overarching constraint that lead to compromises that the European Commission is still taking to the highest possible denominator through hard work and skills. And yet a turbulent drafting process may have produced the overlapping of different policy goals (competition and consumer protection) and different methods to pursue them (regulation is meant to be ex-ante, however ex-post investigations may not be excluded). Indeed, as formulated, the proposed legislation could have effect not just on American tech giants but also on European gatekeepers, while missing many Chinese internet titans that no doubt hope to make inroads in Europe.

## **CORPORATE DECLINE AND EUROPEAN PLATFORMS?**

Europe should, also, strive to create an environment where new European innovative companies could germinate and thrive.

The structure of European economy and innovation systems seem, in fact, to be structurally different from American and Chinese ones. Europe is much more about SMEs which even achieve leadership in their industries and, therefore, one should not be surprised for seeing so few European companies amongst the largest of the world for market capitalization (actually there is only one in the top twenty) or amongst UNICORNS (only 28 out of more than 500, according to the VISION paper).

And yet there are two trends for which a policy response would be worthwhile: a) the gradual disappearance of European multinationals from the corporate giants is a relatively new phenomenon (twenty years ago European companies accounted for more than 30% of global market capitalization; today for less than 15%): the parallel decline in the EU's share of world economy may say that a certain scale is still important to compete; b) even more worrying, if we consider the 143 companies whose market value is above 100 billion EURO, one third of them were established in the last 50 years and none is European.

There is, thus, an issue of market dynamism which needs to be greatly enhanced.

It is critical to remember that companies which today control the world's digital infrastructure were not designed by committee in Washington<sup>12</sup> or Beijing. If they then became tools of geopolitical influence, that was not their original intent. Nor, for that matter, was their global reach. Rather, they offered a service—accurate internet search, convenient socialising, easy shopping, accessible entertainment or quick payments—that appealed to users. And they created profitable business models around those services. This is true of Amazon, Google and Facebook as it is of Alibaba and Tencent. All of them also attained their gigantic size and global reach in a regulatory wild west and wild east, and might never have reached their current proportions if tight regulations had been in place.

Leaving aside the desirability of such an outcome, it does raise the question of how a European platform could ever hope to become large enough to rival the American and Chinese ones under a regulatory regime that implicitly aims to keep platform growth in check. Here, Europe has some intriguing options to spur innovation through differentiation.

On the private-sector side, budding European platforms could, for instance, offer safety over speed, or champion ethical and unbiased artificial intelligence. The public sector, in the EU and member states, could start by completing a single market where competition may select European companies which may be big enough to reach global scope. This would enable start-ups to treat the entire EU as their addressable market rather than just their home countries—and in turn make it easier to compete with incumbent giants that have the resources to run independent operations in various EU countries. Rules for what companies and other organisations cannot do with data—which is the focus of GDPR, DMA and DSA—should be complemented with a data-governance act that would spell out how data can be used. Europeans could experiment with public-private or federated models that pool the data resources of smaller entities, as GAIA-X is striving to do for data and cloud infrastructure. Europe could even begin to think about creating self-compliant platforms.

Last but not least, consumers may even provide room for innovation: the last pandemic clearly demonstrate that very few platforms (like ZOOM or Microsoft Teams) cannot accommodate for very different needs, products and customer segments: this is especially true for key sectors like health care and education and for age groups like the elderly and primary school kids.

The important of unleashing animal spirits does not, however, get rid of an important role of public investment and, even more, of public coordination of private ones: it is critical that the EU engaged itself into a continuous update of the basic information infrastructure (Ultra-Broad-Band, 5G, ..) which is essential to promote an enough big EU market.

The problem, however, is still: how do we bring INTERNET to its initial promise whereas this implies to be able to promote an agenda which goes beyond the European Union's remit?

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<sup>12</sup> True Internet was born out in 1969 out of a "contest" promoted by the Pentagon and its special R&D unit called DARPA. Its commercial diffusion, however, was almost entirely due to private market forces.

On the global stage, the EU should ally itself with other like-minded democracies. Europe is often rhetorically placed between America and China but it is not equidistant to each of these. Though Brussels must collaborate with Washington and Beijing, as well as other parts of the world, on issues of common concern, Europe has been and will be closer to America than to China. Recent progress on global corporate taxation at the G7 and a newfound zeal for reining in big tech in Washington suggests such an alliance is possible. Other parts of the world may also be allied: Africa, where China has occupied an European vacuum (and exports of surveillance equipment is booming) is our closest neighbourhood; however, parts of Latin America and of Asia may share an agenda for Internet that Europe may promote.

### **WHAT KIND OF PLATFORMS?**

A third possible way would be to mix regulation and technologies and, more precisely, uses regulation (and even financial incentives) to promote technologies that appear to be more consistent with this objective. This would, thus, probably mean to favour: decentralized and interoperable technologies vs centralized non-interoperable; open standard to guarantee native compatibility and interoperability vs proprietary, non-compatible one another technologies; transparent and configurable technologies that allow users to implement their first order rules (to adapt to existing and future regulations) vs opaque, black-boxed, non-configurable technologies, with embedded self-defined access rules<sup>13</sup>.

An important guideline to promote this is the Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government and the chapter on digital sovereignty: it promote standardization, modular architectures and open source; but also the use of the public sector, the public procurement and the need to overhaul its information systems as a leverage.

The NGEU may, in this sense, have been a missed opportunity. Some of the most sizeable Recovery and Resilience Plan (for instance the Italian one) make very little reference to the choice that the EU is making as far as technological solutions.

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Europe is not a digital wasteland. Without the sophisticated chipmaking kit built by ASML, a Dutch company, the world's semiconductor companies would grind to a halt. Ericsson and Nokia compete with Huawei to equip the world with 5G mobile networks. Sweden's Spotify is the envy of the music-streaming world. European online banking and many of its fintech firms have a lot to teach Wall Street and Silicon Valley.

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<sup>13</sup> More in general developing a backbone of EU certification technologies based on DLT (like the EBSI, a European Blockchain, and e-IDAS, the European digital identity standard) and DAO (Distributed Autonomous Organizations, governed by participants through distributed consensus and technological components that agree to be monitored and certified by the members of the organization)

Europe is fundamentally no less endowed with human capital and ingenuity than any other place. Exporting European values to the world, including parts of it that look to Europe as a benevolent alternative to American or Chinese hegemony, will be easier if Europe can take advantage of this remarkable endowment.

However, we believe that we are still missing a comprehensive, coordinated (and yet flexible, pragmatic) strategy which would use the three levers - regulations of existing platforms, incentives to nurture more European companies to compete for global digital leadership, policies capable to steer markets towards more open standards and more products/ customers differentiation – different participants have suggested. We believe that more debate like the Messina/ Taormina one, from different academic and industrial backgrounds, different national cultures and even from outside the EU is key to the future.

## **WORKING GROUP 2: NEXT GENERATION EU AND COMPLETING THE EU HAMILTONIAN MOMENT<sup>14</sup>**

Coordinators: Koert Debeuf (Director of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Europe and Editor in Chief, EUobserver), Nicola Saldutti (Corriere della Sera), Stefania Baroncelli (Professor Public and European Union Law at Free University of Bozen-Bolzano), Marco Maria Aterrano (Università degli Studi di Messina - docente di Storia Contemporanea)

Historically, the evolution of a distinctly European social model generated in European citizens the expectation that certain standards of living, especially in matters of health, education, life expectancy, social protection, were to be enabled by the State and the community. This *European way of life*, as defined by historian Tony Judt, while in crisis, still maintains its promise of job security, substantial social transfer payments and progressive tax rates, which represent in the eyes of most Europeans an implicit social contract between the State and its citizens.

The long-lasting health, economic and social crisis deprived Europeans of many of these certainties. In such framework, any future investment needs to be guided by the double objective of reducing the gap existing between citizens and institutions on the one hand, and granting the widest participation and involvement of people in the implementation of these projects themselves on the other. These must be the pillars for the success of Next Gen EU and similar projects that will follow in its footsteps.

## **THE NEXT GENERATION EU IS HERE TO STAY ..**

In the unanimous opinion of the speakers from the working group, Next Gen EU should not be limited to a powerful yet transitory intervention of EU institutions, but rather be transformed into a structural mechanism in the future. Naturally, the system of common debt cannot and must not refer to pre-existing national debt from each of the member

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<sup>14</sup> The background of the WG was the conference concept paper and the VISION paper on “completing EUROPE’s Hamiltonian moment” accessible at <https://www.thinktank.vision/en/magazine/the-future-of-europe/one-year-later-is-next-generation-eu-working>

States; rather, the creation of a European common debt needs to become the core for the realization of efficient and wide-reaching EU projects. In order to make this change possible on a permanent basis, it is necessary to think about equipping the EU with more tax-raising capacity and proper constitutional adjustments (eg increase powers in the fiscal domain and involvement of the European Parliament). This will enable greater legitimacy, reduce the conflict between the EU countries and the attacks to the supremacy of EU Law (eg. progressive and frugal; Poland and Hungary). At the same time, among future goals, the scaling up of financing mechanisms and the mobilization of private capital need to be put at the center of all EU endeavours.

## **.. WITH SOME SIGNIFICANT CHANGES**

The objective to complete the Hamiltonian moment of Europe implies, however, that the Taormina/ Messina conference believes that it is not too early to start assessing the experience of the NEXT GENERATION EU together with the evaluation of more consolidated policy instruments. A number of recommendations emerge from the WG:

1. Within the framework of the progressive transformation of common European debt from contingent to permanent, it is advisable not to overlook the existing experience of the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), which has been successful in mobilizing private investors. A mixed system of investment, part public and part private in nature, is necessary to reach the overarching objectives of the EU, as large funding schemes cannot weigh exclusively on EU budget.
2. Common debt should preferably tend to stimulate transnational investments, rather than focus solely on national projects. Additionally, it could be argued that a reasonable objective would be the articulation of a plan that incentivizes investments in local, small and medium-sized businesses with the support of the Union, so that part of the risk involved would be shared with the EU.
3. Next Gen EU provides both European and national institutions with an opportunity to bring back in the debate the idea of industrial policies considering how global value chains are being shortened and reconsidered in a post pandemic world. This would also stimulate the interaction between small, medium and big *industry*. Its overall goal must be the achievement of a new, more equitable balance between businesses and consumers.
4. The suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact, which made the activation of resources for 7 trillion Euros possible, is a temporary measure that could be reviewed and extended, so as to provide the basis for reflection on future developments. With a view on the creation of what could be defined as a *stability and resilience pact*, a central role could be played by the principle contained in art. 18 of the PNRR regulations, which requires member States to account for the involvement of civil society in the preparation and implementation of recovery plans.
5. Any modification of the stability pact would find its rationale in the Next Gen EU's satisfactory outcome. Italy's success in the implementation of the PNRR will play a fundamental part in this and some participants wished that this over exposure to the outcome in one country is not to be repeated.

6. In order to avoid interventions by national authorities that could potentially weaken the strength and momentum of the integration process, it would be advisable to make the implementation of Next Gen EU ever more unitary and cohesive, by having all actors involved subscribe to a shared set of values and principles.
7. The more recently funded projects need to take into account pre-existing development plans, according to a principle of complementarity. Further, the synergy between the different sectors of investment is also a fundamental tool for the success of Next Gen EU.
8. Every political-financial action of the EU should always be aware of the constantly evolving global trends in the field of geopolitics, technological innovation, climate change, and oppose policies that can threaten the *European way of life*.
9. Guiding principles of the European institutions' funding action should always be the strengthening of social equity and the principle of subsidiarity: it is therefore essential to favor projects that go beyond the traditional core business of nation-states and that aim to reduce economic and social inequalities between European regions and different segments of each member State's population.
10. The need to introduce more flexible governance mechanisms capable of taking into account the different speed of development and growth of each member State is becoming increasingly evident. Acknowledging this need does not imply giving up on pushing for cohesive, inclusive programs of European development, but could rather have the advantage of tying the economic growth of "slower" countries to that of "faster" ones. For this reason, the priority is to increase the spending capacity of individual countries, proceeding to streamline their internal structures of public administration, and at the same time reinforcing integrated forms of cooperation between States.

### **WG 3 REPORT. THE GREAT PANDEMIC AND ADAPTING THE WELFARE AND HEALTH SYSTEMS TO THE 21ST CENTURY**

Introduction: Stefano Campostrini (Professore ordinario Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Angela Giuffrida (The Guardian), Antonio Negro (Vision)

The trend that we are witnessing in Europe over the latest years, even preceding the pandemic that we have lived through, is the increased longevity of the population due to a constant decrease in mortality. The case of Italy is a prime example of this trend. The simultaneous reduction in birthrate has determined a progressive aging of the population, a circumstance that per se should determine a renewal of the healthcare and welfare systems robust enough to meet the new needs of the emerging demographic makeup.

Beyond these social-demographic ones, which are purely endogenous to the old continent, other factors that complicate the picture are tied to strongly accelerating mega-trends, such as globalization (both of the economic and non-economic types), climate change, migratory pressures (often connected to the prior two factors), and global health issues amongst which the pandemic has been only the most evident (microbial resistance, for instance, is likely to

wreak havoc eventually). Another trend that raises the level of complexity and the need for new, adequate responses, is the increase of inequalities within and among several countries, a phenomenon made more acute by the pandemic. Said inequalities regard personal incomes (and more so finances) and are reflected in considerable educational, health and general wellbeing gaps.

## **HERE COMES THE PANDEMIC ..**

If we look at the most significant Covid-19-related numbers – distribution of COVID-19 cases and deaths (as reported by the World Health Organization as of 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021) – the European Union bears a share (more than 20%) that is greater than their contribution to the world's population (less than 7%)<sup>15</sup>.

In the meantime, the 15 ASIA – OCEANIA countries which share the Pacific western shore (and just established the so called “Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership”) did much better: notwithstanding they host 30% of the world population (more than 2 billion people) and account for 30% of world GDP, they still suffered less COVID19 deaths than Spain alone (with less than 50 million inhabitants). And yet the fact that Spain was considered the third best healthcare systems of the world (for instance, Reuters 2020) says that we may have been missing something.

In the second phase, owing to a better vaccination campaign USA and UK have reduced the burden; initially the EU was greatly slowed down by the very decision to suddenly bring to the European level a policy which is still technically and firmly national but by July 2021 had caught up with the UK and even overtaken the USA in terms of share of the population vaccinated.

## **.. WHICH MEANS A GREAT RETHINKING OF THE WELFARE SUPERPOWER (AND OF THE EC'S ROLE)**

In a similar context of constant change, it is necessary to shift the organizational paradigm in such a way that it becomes more open and responsive to research findings and innovative approaches.

1. The pandemic showed the contradiction of an area of free circulation of people which does not have in place mechanisms through which responses to a health emergency which do impact mobility, are, at least, coordinated (or centrally managed). It is an example of how half integration (like the Schengen one) may demonstrate to be sub optimal and unstable in case of crises. A European Union which is capable to face the emergencies that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is making more frequent needs provisions that guarantee efficiency and greater speed should certain disruptions happen again: this may, even, imply change to the treaties.

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<sup>15</sup> Similar picture emerges when we consider different account for COVID-19 deaths: according to THE ECONOMIST which calculated excess deaths from all causes vis-à-vis historical averages in the pandemic months, 5 out of the 15 worst hit countries are from the EU. All Asia Pacific States recorded less deaths than normal averages during the same period.



2. Numbers, however, say that the resilience of different national systems have been different: Germany, Denmark, Finland seemed to have done much better than Spain or Italy. This makes room for identifying benchmarks and for mutual learning based on evidence. We also encourage to better consider the case of the Asia Pacific countries which have better contained the virus: their system of testing, tracing and treating contagions is to be considered an instrument to fight emergencies and least as important as vaccines.
3. It is impossible to face, at a local or national level, issues that cut across borders (as mentioned, the different choices made with regards to the management of the pandemic created paradoxical situations, especially in areas along borders). A European regulatory system capable of managing emergencies efficiently and effectively must be put in place, since uncoordinated actions have proven to be scarcely effective.
4. Consequently, European agencies' roles must be reinforced so that they may at least coordinate and manage data sharing and research activities. If an effective reform of existing European agencies is not possible, then it would be necessary to create new ones to conduct these activities. Moreover, the pandemic has exacerbated the need to invest not only in innovations, but also in the study of processes that enable the transformation of innovation into tangible benefits for all population groups.
5. The recent pandemic crisis and the lack of medical devices and materials have highlighted how important it is to re-shore the production of these strategic products.
6. In terms of healthcare expenditure in Europe, the 3% spent on prevention compared to the 97% spent on care has proven to be absolutely inadequate and shortsighted. In light of the social-demographic changes, investing more in prevention will become a key factor in determining the sustainability of healthcare systems.
7. As far as the adoption and use of new technologies is concerned, it is fundamental to consider their inclusivity. Everyone must be able to access them so that prevention and care of the entire population can be simpler and more effective.
8. Access to care for all is another essential point: insurance coverages and the public-private mix must be regulated in such a way that no one is left behind. The root causes of health inequalities need to be addressed. Unequal access to care for some jeopardizes the health of all. Case in point is the differentialized access to anti-covid vaccines across the world is case-in-point: new and more dangerous variants of the virus have emerged as a result. This problem is connected to the issue of patent regulation, especially in the healthcare field.
9. If the struggle for universal healthcare is global, then it is necessary, symbolically, and substantially emblematic – at a European level – to guarantee minimal standards of treatment and care for all EU citizens. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that it is both a moral imperative and convenient that the vaccination campaign does reach Africa and underdeveloped countries (whereas the WHO sponsored COVAX project did fail its targets).

10. One cannot institute a “European Healthcare System” without contemplating a more complex, overarching welfare system. A “European approach to social issues” must be crafted and shared.

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Vision will follow up the Conference with further initiatives with its fellow partners and sponsors. The intention is to renovate the greatest Post World War dream and bring its values to the 21st century.

## ANNEX PLENARY SESSION REPORTS

### 1. “THE OTHER NEXT GENERATION EU AND ... REFORMING REGIONAL COHESION POLICIES”

Introduction: Francesco Grillo

Chair: John Hooper.

Discussants: Alberto Bramanti, Mikel Landabaso.

Much of the debate on the response of the Union to the Pandemic crisis has been absorbed by the implications of the new 750 billion EURO package called Next Generation EU. However, NGEU is only a part of a much larger multiannual financial framework whose total size is of 1,850 billion EURO to be spent in 2021 – 2027 programming period (which is almost twice the budget of 959 billion EURO that were made available to the Commission for the previous 2014 – 2020 period). In fact, almost one third of the budget of the Commission is dedicated to Cohesion Policies to be spent mostly in less developed Regions (like the ones of South Italy including Sicily) with the objective to reduce important gaps in growth and employment across the EU’s territory.

However, statistical evidence suggest that in recent years the inequalities amongst regions have reverted their downward trend and they are growing<sup>16</sup> again.

Which are the ideas to increase the capability of cohesion policies to reach their objective? Is the paradigm of smart specialization (the idea that each Region develop distinctive competitive advantage on the basis of its own characteristics) working? Could regional policies adopt the NGEU’s philosophy to only pay member states when expected results are achieved?

### 2. “POSITIVE ACTIONS FOR BUILDING EUROPE FROM THE BOTTOM UP<sup>17</sup>”

Introduction: Lorenzo Fioramonti

Chair: Angela Giuffrida (The Guardian)

Discussants: Kalypto Nikolaidis, Francesca Pellegrino, Stefania Baroncelli, Sandro Gozi, Roberto Castaldi.

*“We (half) made Europe; we now need to make Europeans”*. What the Italian patriot Massimo D’Azeglio said about the project of “making Italy” in 1861, may well apply to Europe. Without a European Demos and a European-wide debate that cannot be split along national lines, further integration of the Union will be politically weak and could even backfire.

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<sup>16</sup> As in a recent Vision paper mentioned by THE ECONOMIST <https://www.thinktank.vision/en/media-en/articles/you-can-keep-your-money>

<sup>17</sup> The background is completed by the VISION paper on “ERASMUS and Community Service: the way forward” <https://www.thinktank.vision/en/media-en/publications/erasmus-and-civil-service-as-the-way-forward-to-a-european-demos-rationale-and-feasibility>

Italy and other states became (at least partially) “united” through the institution of free public education, as well as the nation-wide television and military conscription. The Conference (which Conference?) considered actions specifically targeted to encourage the creation of a European *demos*, or at least a European public opinion, without which the entire construction is fragile.

So much has been done in the last 15 years by the European Union in the way of creating that sense of *Europeanness*, the sense of a common citizenship and belonging. And the pandemic was somehow useful to show everyone the importance of “staying (sticking?) together” and the problems derived by staying isolated. But still so much has to be done in order to create a common *demos*.

It is, of course, necessary for the European Union to create a new democratic connection with its citizens. The younger generations especially want to be involved. The representative institutions are still the center of the democracy, but these must be supported through bottom-up legitimation and collective intelligence. In this process, Europe can inspire the rest of the World, at a time when many other countries’ democracies are faltering. An example might be the so-called *democratic Panopticon*. The citizens, collectively, can permanently control what the politicians do and call on them for accountability by being able to trace through online portals the use of European funds. The work of the European Union must be clear and transparent. A necessary condition for that is having a concretely efficient and effective European Union, and this can be done only by creating different circles of autonomy: Europe should try not to do everything for everyone, but instead focus on the things that it can do better. This is clearly connected to the reform of the voting system, which should stimulate the “European” dimension of some elections.

One of the most important programs that in the last years have significantly contributed to strengthen the sense of *Europeanness* was the Erasmus program. However, its value is still, at all political levels, underestimated. For these reasons, it is central for these mobility programs to receive more funds and enlarge the participating population.

Other than financing the *Erasmus for all*, other actions that are less expensive and more feasible in the short term, can be accomplished to strengthen European citizenship:

- Short, online compulsory modules on European citizenship education funded by the European Union, to increase the knowledge of its functioning and purpose.
- Mandatory courses on European citizenship education in the school systems (for the youngsters).

Finally, it is central for the survival of the European Union to the *European way*. If the recovery and resilience facility is not focused on strengthening what makes Europe stronger from the social point of view, the opportunity to make Europe not only the largest common market of the World, but also a common area of shared responsibility and vision, will be missed. The social pillar is more important now than ever, in fact Europe cannot afford to become a highly unequal continent and an area of social fragmentation. A central element

to impede this is to put at the center of the recovery and resilience facility investments on people and not on capital goods (and education is a central part of such investments).

### **3. “MEDIAMORFOSI. LA TRASFORMAZIONE DEI MEZZI DI COMUNICAZIONE”**

Introduction: Alexandra Borchardt

Chair: Viviana Mazza

Discussants: Kelly Falconer, Paul Nemitz, Virman Cusenza, Lino Morgante, Virginia Stagni

Mediamorphosis was the title of a 50-minute event that took place in Taormina on June 20th, 2021, organized by Taobuk Festival in collaboration with the GDS/SES Group and with the participation of Vision Think Tank. It was moderated by Corriere della sera journalist Viviana Mazza and it saw the participation of Lino Morgante, Virginia Stagni, Virman Cuzenza and, via remote, Alexandra Borchardt, Paul Nemitz and Kelly Falconer.

Alexandra Borchardt, a professor at the Hamburg Media School and Senior Research Associate of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, began her presentation with the following question: “What needs to happen to make journalism a European affair?”. She said that “the media is not facing a trust crisis, but an attention crisis”. In fact, only 29 percent of people say that the topics chosen by the news media feel relevant to them, according to the Digital News Report 2019 by Reuters Institute. Borchardt suggested, however, that there are new opportunities today (i.e.: publication has become easier, journalism has become participatory, automated translation has made it easier to transcend language barriers, the development of a platform ecosystem has made it easier to reach young people and potentially the disengaged; the Erasmus generation has produced plenty of curious young journalists; lots of young and older founders aim to develop journalism for everyone). The way forward is to “put the user first”, in terms of content (what are the challenges for the people in Europe and how can they be tackled and solved?), platforms (what are the platforms people use, how can they be best reached?), audiences (diversity is a must, but journalism has been dominated by the paradigm of political journalism that has failed to reach diverse audiences), formats (constructive, investigative, explanatory, cross-border journalism). Of course, it is also very important to think of the financial aspects: “European media needs support”.

Lino Morgante, president of Gruppo GDS SES reiterated the importance of funding and defending copyright in order to guarantee quality information. He pointed out that “during the Covid-19 pandemic, an incredible number of people, including young people”, read the digital edition of local newspaper such as Gazzetta del Sud and Giornale di Sicilia, which are part of his editorial group. They were looking for trust-worthy information they could not find on social media, they wanted to verify the rumours. These newspapers websites, which had previously been a secondary platform, have become crucial now, Morgante said. He pointed out the financial challenges, in order to guarantee “quality information at the speed and consistency that people are expecting nowadays”.

Virginia Stagni, business development manager & director FT Talent Challenge, is responsible for attracting a younger audience – mainly under 30– to the Financial Times, which is traditionally the newspaper of the financial elite. The Talent Challenge is aimed to hiring them but also to understanding how they see the FT. “There are many preconceptions about the youth”, she said, adding that she is 28 years old. One of the issues that Stagni discussed is “the dilution of brands” on social media. She mentioned that the Reuters Institute at Oxford University did much research on the issue: one example is users remembering the content of an article shared on social media, but not the media where it was originally published or the journalist who wrote it. The newspaper is countering this phenomenon by trying to be “clear on its values”. The FT’s motto – “Without fear, without favour” – tries to signal to the readers that they will receive quality information and the analysis needed to fully understand it. The FT is also trying to be a pan-European voice: when Brexit happened, the CEO was photographed while planting a EU flag on the headquarters of the newspaper. “Although such an approach may be considered marketing-oriented – she said – I think that there will be an increasing contamination between journalism and other fields, which are more consumer-oriented, in order to really put the audience first. “Dialogue creates trust”, she concluded.

“Audience first” is something that several speakers said. However there was no agreement on how. Kelly Falconer, a literary agent, seemed to object to a point raised by Stagni. “I don’t think it’s the job of European media to foster a sense of European Union – Falconer said -. It is condescending to audiences”.

Paul Nemitz of the Global Council on Extended Intelligence said that he is working on a non-profit and publicly funded European platform. The platform will share contents from all European public televisions, universities, museums and other high-quality video producers. “It must be independent from the States and from financial interests – Nemitz said-. Private TVs and newspapers can contribute with their political and documentary contents”. This platform would be a bridge between European media and citizens but would not damage the companies budgets according to Nemitz. The idea behind it is that media needs to help European citizens talk with one another, overcoming ideological and language barriers. Technology increasingly allows it, offering more efficient translation tools.

Virman Cusenza is the former editor-in-chief of Il Mattino and Il Messaggero, and is now a consultant for the Fremantle Group.. He explained that newspapers have become editorial companies that, along with more traditional content, need videos, podcasts and much more, if they want to survive. The competition between traditional media and social media is a crucial part – both a cause and a consequence - of this transformation. Cusenza quoted the former editor-in-chief at The Independent, a British newspaper where he worked in the past, as saying that there is a difference “between a newspaper and a viewpaper”, between a paper of information and a paper vision. According to Cusenza’s former boss, a viewpaper is more difficult to produce. The issue, he concluded, is: should the editorial company “just” inform or should it promote civic duty?

#### **4. “BREXIT FIVE YEARS ON: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED AND WHERE NEXT?” JUNE 20<sup>TH</sup> 2021**

Introduction/Chair: Bill Emmott.

Discussants: Koert Debeuf, Gavin Hewitt, Michele Messina.

The discussion highlighted what a politically fraught topic Britain’s exit from the European Union remains, five years on from the June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016 referendum and six months on from the formal end of the UK’s ‘transition period’ as it detached itself from EU laws and procedures. The pandemic has undoubtedly slowed and interrupted the process of adjustment and of establishing new relationships, both for the UK and for the 27 EU member-states, but it is still striking how much remains to be defined, developed and determined after five years.

For the UK, the case for Brexit always revolved around a trade-off between expected economic losses, at least in the medium term, and gains in autonomy and identity. In the five years since the referendum, the identity issue has if anything become intensified, thanks to the UK media and to the politics that has surrounded negotiations with the EU and negotiations within Parliament to reach final agreement.

For the EU, an important and explicit objective in the negotiation was to ensure that Britain paid a price for leaving the Union, so as to ensure that no country could believe it could have the advantages of EU membership without bearing the costs and responsibilities of membership. This objective was made easier by the UK’s political decision to opt for a “hard” Brexit, leaving the single market and customs union and refusing any post-Brexit involvement in the UK of the European Court of Justice. This reflected a clear preference for autonomy or sovereignty over economic or procedural convenience.

Nevertheless, the exit procedure, being unprecedented, turned out to be quite legally peculiar. Moreover, thanks to the agreement to keep Northern Ireland inside the EU customs union so as to avoid a land border with Ireland, to the fact that some major areas (such as financial services) have yet to be settled, and to the fact that new UK laws have not yet been passed in some areas, it is still the case that EU law is being applied in the UK. This co-existence is likely to last for some time.

The economic losses from Brexit have been more or less as expected, although the effects of the pandemic make them hard to isolate or put into proportion. Investment, both by UK and by foreign firms, has fallen since July 2016, a trend generally ascribed to increased uncertainty about future regulations and trade terms. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 when new trade terms came into force, there has been a clear decline in UK-EU trade, especially in the food and drink sectors. Some of this is expected to be temporary, but most will be permanent as the costs of UK-EU trade have risen permanently. Trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has increased substantially, however. It is too soon to assess the long-term impact of this decline in trade on UK living standards, as its effect is anyway dwarfed by that of the pandemic.

Politically, the major benefit of Brexit has been seen in the UK's fast, early and successful vaccination programme. The benefit of this is chiefly psychological and political: economically, a lead of 6-8 weeks in vaccinations is hard to quantify, especially as there are other factors such as social restrictions to take into account. But to those who favoured Brexit, the vaccination success has provided a substantial boost.

As the UK and the EU enter the sixth year since the 2016 referendum, they do so in an atmosphere of considerable mistrust, even rancour. Disputes over the Northern Ireland protocol section of the Withdrawal Agreement make this mistrust and rancour unlikely to fade any time soon. Paradoxically, on everything barring bilateral issues the UK and EU policies remain quite closely aligned: on climate, corporate tax, China, Russia and Iran, for example, the UK's stance is at least as close to the EU's as it is to the USA.

From the plenary discussion, two principal ideas emerged:

1. That for both the UK and the EU, it would be desirable to develop, over time, a form of association agreement that reflects the two parties' closeness geographically, economically and culturally. This "outer circle" form of close association could potentially be attractive for other countries too. Unless and until the UK's political preferences change, the parties would need to remain legally separate but through equivalence, mutual recognition and collaborative mechanisms there was an opportunity for them to be much closer than they are in 2021, to mutual benefit.
2. That a loss of special importance for both the UK and the EU promises to be the decline of educational exchange, as the UK leaves Erasmus, and as the research participation of UK universities is also degraded under the new arrangement. In the interim, these ruptures reflect identity politics. But to foster and preserve for the long term the "outer circle" close relationship desired, new means can and should be found to restore and even enhance the depth of educational and research exchange.

## **5. Back to Africa: the Neighborhood's as Europe's next Frontier**

Introduction: Stefania Giannini

Chair: Laura Silvia Battaglia

Discussants: Ruggero Aricò, Hanna Lucinda Smith, Demit Murat Seyret, Luca Jahier, Steven Everts.

Stefania Giannini: Unesco is investing in education, nutrition, health, security. UN advocates for a comprehensive approach to mobilize a multilateral mechanism in prioritizing education, more likely between African governments, European institutions and universities. There's also a need of better data to understand where EU has to focus on, to identify the gap which put Africa behind (200million of children are illiterate) and the reasons why Africa is not able to invest in specific policies. What is the missing point so far? We are still looking at this global South with a post-colonial approach: we tend to prioritize basic education and this is not the right way to go. We have to stay focused more in gender issues



and education, especially after the pandemic, a time when GFM increased a lot, including the practise of early marriages in all sub-Saharan Africa.

Ruggero Aricò: Africa is playing a crucial role in the energy sector in particular in energy transition, sustainable energy, renewable energy. This key sector is developing in Africa and is becoming a priority in the African's countries agenda as well as in Europe, at the point that the goal is now having Africa independent on energy business using the solar energy, considering the fact that Africa is using only the 1% of the solar energy available in the world. The room is there and the historical momentum is there. At the same time we have to face the problem of the climate change in Africa. Climate change has having a big impact on the continent and it is responsible of what we are still calling "natural disasters". Natural disasters are causing conflicts, death, migration and scarcity of natural resources, including water. The recent creation of a Free Trade Area Agreement among African countries is an enormous opportunity, in terms of population and GDP aggregated. The Agenda 2063 "The Africa we want" signed by African Union can use the Free Trade Area as a pillar for a sustainable and inclusive development. If we give power to the words *sustainability* and *inclusion* and we make them the main goals for African countries, we will help the private sector everywhere, in EU for sure, and we can do a lot in terms of dialogue, global trade and foreign policy.

Demir Murat Seyrek: We can't talk about Africa nowadays without talking about China and Russia involvement there. Both countries are increasing their economic power as they have already done in Middle East. I'm talking about disinformation, misinformation and propaganda in the communication system. Something that tries to destroy the principles of the democracy and the pillars of the Western countries. There are no big differences but while EU is more prepared to face these dangers in the Eastern neighborhood, is not aware about what is happening in Africa, where China is working much more freely. Here, while Russia is more involved in political and military influence, especially through Russian mercenaries – 10 African countries have Russian mercenaries on their soils and in Central Republic they are involved in torturing and killing civilians – China is using its political influence too, but much more through the economic means, reaching out and buying the political and economical elites in the African countries. Disinformation and misinformation are for both countries powerful tools, used also during the pandemic, fabricating conspiracy theories against the Westerns vaccines. If we look on how this misinformation targets the health sector and affects the life of people, we can be aware of it and prioritize our observation on that, in order to contrast this influence. Considering also that this kind of misinformation is anti-Western, anti-democratic and it is the best and more effective way for the two powers to impose a different political model. EU has to develop a best unified strategy, not fragmented among the different European States like it is now. Last but not least, many members of EU consider Africa so Southern and so far from them, in geography and politics, so we have to increase their interest for the common goal. Definitely we have to change the way to look at Africa, not only as a continent of migrants, but as a continent of opportunities, putting aside the usual Western post-colonial perspective. Continuing along this old way will give China the best excuse to extend its power more and more on African States.

Steven Everts: The main and strategic question is: which kind of society and model of society will prevail in Africa? Africa in 20 years time will have one billion people more. This is a question of planetary consequence. And, regarding this, there's a main difference, between

elites that can be also authoritarian, repressive, anti-democratic and African citizens that are not happy with that model for power. Young people are contesting everywhere this old model. There's a lot of pressure and competition on Europe but I don't think Africa voted for China. EU spends 20 billion in aid every year in Africa, while China spend only between 4 and 5. We have to build a better narrative and a better communication: our offers are often not understandable by African leaders. It's necessary to imagine a new diplomacy, a different future, and figuring out how we can get there. We have to say that we are not equals in development, and is better to say that Africa is a sister continent and that we can face all the problems of the sustainability all together in the global context. But this can't be done without fundamental freedom, respect for the individuals, and multilateralism. In order this to be done, we have to count on local capacities, and so the question is how avoid corruption, for example? When National authorities are not the first we want to work with, we have to count on local NGOs and civil societies.

Luca Jahier: Africa was an issue very high in the EU Commission agenda under the start of the new presidency of Ursula von der Leyen, but sadly pandemic brake and EU lose his goal, at the point that the biggest failure in foreign policy and diplomacy for EU in the last two years is the vaccination strategy in Africa. We're not talking about lack of vaccines' delivery but also about capacity of production and inoculation of vaccines. Combining all these factors, we see a clear failure in terms also of insecurity and extremism in Africa. Meanwhile, there, for the first time, out of all the external powers, African States have established their own major strategy for the years to come: the African Continental Free Trade Agreement under the The African Union. EU is not profiting from this great market and is not understanding the advantages, even though knows Africa better than China, Russia, Usa and Turkey in the legal framework. We need to have a strategy and a clear partnership with the continent to not lose our advantages. It's not a matter of new colonialism or imperialism, it's a matter of partnership. We can partner African Union to build up what the States have already chosen to do and develop, starting from regional markets. This is the drive for the future.

Hanna Lucinda Smith: Looking to Africa means also looking to Asian and Middle Eastern countries who want to have power and interest in Africa, in competition with EU. Turkey is one of them and Erdogan policies are going to this direction, in Libya, in Horn of Africa and other sub-saharian countries, Turkey is developing a mixture of hard and soft power to extend its ties in the Continent. At the point that Erdogan asked to many African countries to close schools run by Gulenists, now his main internal enemies. And he was quite successfull in most of these countries. Another tool of his soft power is the aid system, provided in an extensive way to Somalia since 2010 and, on the other hand, is the military trade, in terms of arms sells, thanks to a growing Turkish defence industry, and military trainings for local troops. All this business reached Somalia, Kenya and Uganda as well. Last but not least, construction and reconstruction, in the same way China does: this happened again in Somalia, with ports and airports, with roads. Looking to all this picture, is clear that Turkey is making a bet to extend and reinforce its presence in Africa on the long terms. Not counting on its involvement in the Lybian conflict, where the purpose is clear. So, the question for EU is: can EU work alongside Turkey in this context? How this plan could be done, where EU and Turkey have a clash of interests? Turkey is a rival or not in Africa? The question is still open.