

# EPFMA BULLETIN



European Parliament Former Members Association

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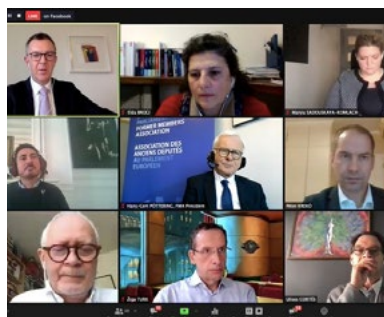
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Safer Internet Day (9 February 2021) was a call to action to contribute to a safer and better internet, especially for its youngest users, to be prepared to handle digital technologies responsibly, respectfully, critically and creatively.

## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

The Editorial Board would like to thank all those members who took the time to contribute to this issue of the FMA Bulletin. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the decision to include an article lies with the FMA Editorial Board and, in principle, contributions from members who are not up-to-date with the payment of the membership fee will not be included. Due to the long time lag between the call for contribution and the publication, some articles may be outdated.

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## Message from the President

Dear Members,

This year, we are delighted and honoured to be celebrating the 20th anniversary of our association, established many years ago by Former President of the European Parliament and FMA Honorary President, Lord Henry Plumb. He laid the foundations for what has now grown into a successful organisation with almost 800 members, who proclaim the European values of democracy and unity beyond their mandates.

Over the last 20 years, we have worked on these values by promoting political dialogue, democracy building and active citizenship through education. We could not have achieved all that we have in recent years without your commitment and dedication to our association. After a turbulent year due to COVID-19, we must not forget to stay positive. Therefore, I suggest that we take the time

to remember the hard work we have all put in over previous years and that we celebrate the FMA's accomplishments. In June, we will publish a special edition of the FMA Bulletin, in which we will retrace our achievements of the last 20 years and look to the future. Meanwhile, I am pleased to present the logo for the FMA's 20th anniversary on this page, which will accompany us throughout this year. We are counting on your active participation in all our various events.

At the end of last year, we launched an initiative to foster debate on the challenges the EU is facing, the work of a reflection group composed of experienced and prestigious former MEPs with the academic support of Professor Steven Van Hecke (KU Leuven University).

This reflection will be fuelled by our 'Together for the Future of Europe' series of events, organised together with the main European political foundations and the European University Institute (EUI). The event series was launched last year and will continue in 2021. In this Bulletin, you can read four articles written by the experts who participated in

the event organised in December 2020 informing citizens about digital transformation. Members who were not able to attend the round table can watch the full video on the [FMA website](#).

Although 2021 will be a year of celebration, we cannot forget that the COVID-19 pandemic is still taking over our lives. This edition of the FMA Bulletin is fully dedicated to the challenges we have faced in the past year and what we should know about COVID-19. Specialists will talk about the psychological, economic and general impacts of COVID-19 on our lives and on the functioning of the EU institutions.

We have all experienced a sense of powerlessness, but that did not prevent us from continuing to proclaim and defend our values. The organisation of our EP to Campus programme online allowed us to get in contact with universities in other continents. In this issue, four former Members talk about their virtual EP to Campus experience. Among other things, this initiative has proven that we as former Members of the European Parliament can be innovative and creative and are motivated to get through this difficult period in the best possible way.

We are proud of our progress and look forward to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our association with you soon.

Hans-Gert Pöttering  
FMA President





# EP AT WORK

## KEY FACTS

### **MEPs paved the way for an effective EU health programme. (November session - P9\_TA(2020)0304).**

To close gaps exposed by COVID-19 and ensure that health systems can face future threats to public health, an ambitious EU health programme is needed. .

### **Steps to improved EU democracy ahead of 2024 elections. (November session - P9\_TA(2020)0327)**

MEPs adopted a resolution that draws conclusions to enhance democracy and enable full participation in the European political space, based on lessons from the 2019 European elections.

### **Parliament approved the “Rule of law conditionality” for access to EU funds. (December session - P9\_TA(2020)0356)**

Under the new regulation, EU budget payments can be withheld from countries in which established breaches of the rule of law compromise management of the EU funds.

### **“Minority SafePack”: Parliament supports proposals for diversity across EU. (December session - P9\_TA(2020)0370)**

MEPs called on the Commission to act on the European Citizens’ Initiative proposals that aim to enhance cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU.

### **Guidelines for military and non-military use of Artificial Intelligence. (January session - P9\_TA-PROV(2021)0009)**

MEPS called for an EU legal framework on AI with definitions and ethical principles, including its military use.

### **MEPs: Minimum wage is a remedy for inequality and in-work poverty. (February session - P9\_TA-PROV(2021)0044)**

To fight inequality and in-work poverty, MEPs called for a minimum wage, equal labour conditions for platform workers and a better work-life balance.

*Other main dossiers discussed in the plenary sessions were:*

#### **November 2020**

- Parliament warns against “risk of abuse of power” in the context of national measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. (13.11.20)
- Parliament wants to boost sustainability by promoting reuse and repairs and by tackling practices that shorten the lifespan of products. (25.11.20)
- Parliament points to “attempts by governments of some member states to silence critical and independent media and undermine media freedom and pluralism”. (25.11.20)
- Parliament adopted its 2018-2019 report on the state of fundamental rights in the EU, identifying multiple areas of concern. (26.11.20)
- MEPs condemned the setback to

women’s sexual and reproductive rights in Poland and stress the EU’s legal obligation to uphold and protect them. (26.11.20)

#### **December 2020**

- Parliament approved the agreement with member states on the new drinking water directive that will give better access to high quality tap water. (15.12.20)
- MEPs approved provisions for a smooth transition from the current EU farm policy to the future one. (16.12.20)

#### **January 2021**

- Foreign and security policy: MEPs called for unity and strategic autonomy. The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for Europe, which needs a stronger, more united and more assertive foreign

and security policy (20.01.21)

- MEPs called on the Commission to propose a law that enables those who work digitally to disconnect outside their working hours. (21.01.21)
- MEPs called on the EU to recognise access to decent and affordable housing as an enforceable human right and to push for measures to eradicate homelessness. (21.01.21)

#### **February 2021**

- MEPs called on the Commission and member states to increase their efforts to prevent the pandemic from having lasting negative effects on young people and the sports sector. (10.02.21)

*For more information, please visit : <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/plenary>*



# CURRENT AFFAIRS

## A NEW CHAPTER IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

*The inauguration of Joe Biden opens a welcome new chapter in EU-US relations. We agree with President Biden that there is much to rebuild, both at home and abroad. As EU we want to revive the EU-US partnership, which is so important at a time of tumultuous global change.*

As I have stated in my address to the European Parliament a few days after the election of Joe Biden, this is a moment of opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. President Biden has clearly indicated that he wants to work closely with the EU, as part of a wider return to working with allies and multilateralism. All EU institutions have a key role to play in this new phase, including the Parliament through the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue.

The reason is simple: after four turbulent years, Europe wants its closest partner back at the world's table. In my conversation with the new Secretary of State Tony Blinken, we agreed that the EU and US must pull in the same direction to solve pressing global problems. He has joined EU Foreign Ministers on 22 February for an in-depth discussion on how we advance our partnership and define common priorities for action. As EU we are ready. Together with the European Commission, I put forward a comprehensive "EU-US agenda for global change". It spans four broad areas: green leadership, the COVID-19 response and global health, trade and technology, plus global action and security.

In the coming weeks and months, the focus will remain on tackling the pandemic, rolling out vaccines and ensuring a solid green economic recovery. What is clear is that the

world needs American and European leadership in this battle and I am very happy that President Biden has already signed an executive order to reverse the decision to leave the World Health Organization.

**"After four turbulent years, Europe wants its closest partner back at the world's table."**

In the same way, the decision of President Biden to re-join the Paris climate agreement is fundamental. Working together on the climate crisis is at the forefront of our agenda: Together with my colleague Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans and EU Foreign Ministers, we spoke with the new US Climate Envoy John Kerry about how we can cooperate again in the fight against climate change.

We have proposed a transatlantic 'green agenda', to mobilise more ambitious global climate action, starting with a joint commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050. For this, we must forge a green technology alliance; phase out fossil fuels; avoid carbon leakage; develop a global regulatory framework for sustainable finance and help poorer countries to adapt to climate change. We have much to do together and we have no time to waste.

The US also plays an essential role in the maintenance of peace and security, including on our continent and at our borders, from the Western Balkans, to the Eastern Mediterranean to Ukraine and beyond. Our key priorities also include reviving the Iran nuclear deal

and developing a proper dialogue to discuss the full range of issues related to China.

Many US administrations have insisted that Europeans take better care of their own security and act as a security provider. So it matters that we are already actively working to strengthen EU defence policies, capacities and operations. Our flagship defence initiatives already include the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and military mobility. Indeed, a strong and capable Europe is not a rival to the trans-Atlantic alliance but a precondition for it.

Finally, the area of technology is fully part of our modern foreign policy agenda. We want to cooperate on devising clear rules and their enforcement on the responsibility of online platforms and Big Tech, ensure fair taxation and tackle market distortions, and develop a common normative approach to the future development of key technologies. Let us in the 'tech democracies' provide a response to these challenges before it is too late.

In sum, the list of issues to work on is long. And sometimes differences in views between us will persist. That is normal. But with the Biden administration, the tone and basic posture is clearly changing. In diplomacy, that matters a lot. *C'est le ton qui fait la musique, as they say in French. Let's get to work.*

**Josep Borrell Fontelles**  
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/  
Vice-President of the European Commission

## U.S. ELECTION RESULT: A GLIMMER OF HOPE ...

**... but there's still a long way to go.**

At the time of writing, the United States is preparing to swear Joe Biden and Kamala Harris into office. As contentious as the 2020 US elections were, there is a glimmer of light at the end of a four-year long tunnel of chaos and darkness. For Europe, the defeat of Donald Trump hopefully signals a shift in the U.S.'s international approach, making it a stronger ally in fighting COVID-19, climate change, inequality and corruption – issues we must tackle together globally. However, as the attack on the Capitol in January showed, it is too early for progressives to let down our guard against far-right movements. Recent years have seen a conservative backlash against women, LGBTIQ persons and minorities in the US. From curtailing access to abortion and threatening Roe v. Wade, to removing protections for trans people and committing acts of violence and discrimination against people of colour, American right-wing forces, with Trump as their figurehead, have made life for anyone who does not belong to a white, male, heterosexual elite

very difficult. Similar authoritarian tendencies exist in Europe, where some male leaders do everything to stay in power while undermining fundamental rights.

**“The defeat of Donald Trump hopefully signals a shift in the US's international approach, making it a stronger ally in fighting COVID-19, climate change, inequality and corruption.”**

Progressives have not been silent. Biden and Harris' victory (thanks to [women voters](#)) follows years of progressive outcry, from the women's marches against Trump's misogyny to the Black Lives Matter protests. For feminists and LGBTIQ activists, Biden and Harris have an encouraging record when it comes to standing up for equality, affordable healthcare, same-sex marriage, reproductive health, gender equality and minority rights. Biden's [agenda for gender equality](#) focuses on economic security, health care, work-life balance, combatting violence against women, and protecting and empowering women globally. Harris, one of Trump's most vocal critics, has made expanding healthcare and defending sexual and reproductive rights a priority. Such policies are sorely needed, as women in America have borne the brunt of job losses, unpaid care and frontline work during the pandemic. With a tied Senate working in the Democrats' favour, some of Biden

and Harris' campaign promises may hopefully be realised. Moreover, Biden's cabinet will be one of the most diverse in US history and Harris will be the first female vice-president of colour – a victory for representative democracy. Yet, the road to a more equal U.S. is not without its challenges; on the Supreme Court, Trump replaced feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg with conservative Amy Coney Barrett right before the elections, and he managed to appoint over 200 conservative judges across the federal judiciary. Furthermore, as shown by the alt-right attacks on the Capitol, bigotry and hate still permeate the US political discourse. The deep wounds of Trump's presidency will not heal overnight. Europe is trusting Biden and Harris to set the US back on a course of democratic leadership and transatlantic partnership. Progressives are counting on them to start closing the gaps around gender, racial and economic inequality. Europe must offer its support, but also hold the new administration accountable. The women's movement will definitely do so. The new presidential term brings energy, but the fight is not won as long as hate, patriarchy and racism persist in America, Europe or the rest of the world.



Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. President-elect of the United States. © European Union 2020 - Source : EP

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## THERE IS NO STRENGTH WITHOUT UNITY

**“Ní neart go cur le chéile”  
There is no strength  
without unity**

Once the news of a last minute trade deal emerged on Christmas eve an audible sigh of relief could be heard across the EU and in London that the cliff edge of no-deal had been avoided. Not quite an early Christmas present perhaps, but it must be remembered that although there are no winners, the deal does ensure less of a loss than no deal. An unfortunate situation which has been called a ‘lose-lose’ by Michel Barnier - the glue which held the unity of the EU together. He, along with his team, should be congratulated for his composure and skill in crafting this trade deal. Were it not for his depth of knowledge and patience, we would not be here now. A real demonstration of “there is no strength without unity” - “Ní neart go cur le chéile”.

As an Irish person who for many years supported the Peace programme from within the European Parliament, I can say the ‘withdrawal agreement’ was crucial for peace as well as economic and social development on the Island of

Ireland both North and South and the hope that that we will never to return to the dark days of the past. It is people not borders who are needed to create peace. The new status now granted to Northern Ireland, might pave the way for the potential benefits of a united Ireland in the near future.

**“The shock of the BREXIT referendum 4 ½ years ago, was and still is, a wake-up call to the EU. We need to reach out and communicate better with people across the regions and cities of Europe.”**

I very much welcome the decision of the Irish Government to allow students in Northern Ireland to have continued access to ERASMUS - an amazing programme which has really benefited students across the EU. In my humble opinion this withdrawal of the UK government is something they will regret in the future as it may have been based on false facts

rather than the real benefits of the student exchanges.

The sacrificial lamb of this new trade deal was unfortunately once again our fishing and coastal communities. The UK is so very dependent on selling its fish to the EU that it is unfortunate that we were not able to secure those extra percentages of quota which would make more for a more viable ‘landing’ for those communities. The EU now needs to put a package together to help innovate and add value to the future catch.

The shock of the BREXIT referendum 4 ½ years ago, was and still is, a wake-up call to the EU. We need to reach out and communicate better with people across the regions and cities of Europe. We need to be more reflective of their needs and faster responding to them. Individual institutions promoting their own work, what I would call ‘navel gazing’, instead of all EU institutions working together has not worked and will not in the future.

The process of negotiating the withdrawal of the UK demonstrated clearly the huge loss to the EU of a valued partner but moreso the tragic loss of past benefits of membership to the UK. My hope is that the young generations, in which we have great hope, from the UK and EU will forge a new greater and deeper vision of our future together similar to what Schuman and Monnet achieved in the very beginning of the European Dream.

**Brian Crowley**

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EP Plenary session - Withdrawal Agreement of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union © European Union 2020 - Source : EP



## HOW BREXIT HAPPENED

Brexit happened because of a parliamentary stalemate, unfortunate judgments by pro-European UK political parties and the lack of a proportional electoral system for Westminster elections. At the end of 2019 it was a choice between a parliamentary election or a second EU referendum – a People’s Vote, for which I campaigned for two years. On the verge of achieving a parliamentary majority for a second referendum, the internationalist Liberal Democrats – who had been told by pollsters that they could win nearly 200 seats from their base of 11 Members of Parliament (MPs) – and the nationalist but pro-EU Scottish National Party who also expected to win seats (they gained 13 MPs to a total of 48) conceded the holding of a General Election. This decision led to Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party winning an 80-seat majority in the 650-member House of Commons, claiming to “Get Brexit Done” through the distorting UK “first past the post” single-member constituency electoral system. A key factor was former MEP Nigel Farage’s decision to withdraw his Brexit Party candidates in favour of the Conservatives in 317

constituencies. Nearly 52 per cent of voters supported parties in favour of a second referendum compared with 47 per cent who supported Brexit-backing parties.

Farage had said the month before the June 2016 EU referendum that a 52-48 per cent result would be “unfinished business” – but he accepted the result nevertheless. However public opinion since the referendum has been tested weekly in pollster YouGov’s Brexit Tracker and has consistently shown a “wrong” of double digits to the question “In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the European Union?”

Noting this, a pro-EU forum of over 100 academics, journalists, parliamentarians and campaign organisations which I have coordinated since 2017 decided in early 2018 to create a media hub to campaign for a second EU referendum. Alastair Campbell, former media adviser to Tony Blair as prime minister, became honorary editor-in-chief. He later said that the first £1 million (about €1.1 million) which I raised from Superdry clothing millionaire Julian Dunkerton effectively launched

the “People’s Vote” campaign for a second referendum. This united several pro-EU campaign groups in one HQ with a mostly young, enthusiastic staff. But as Campbell said “at the start, you could fit the Members of Parliament openly backing People’s Vote in the back of a cab.”

The proposal for a second referendum was first put to the House of Commons in March 2019 with a motion to extend the Article 50 deadline – the process ending the UK’s EU membership - where it was rejected by 334-85, with the Labour Party (and all but 43 of its MPs) abstaining.

However by October 2019, after stunningly large People’s Vote rallies across the country – the last with over a million people marching peacefully on London’s Parliament Square - and a skilful lobbying campaign to change Labour’s policy, a second referendum was only short of 14 votes.

The same weekend that the 10 Ulster Unionist MPs – who vigorously opposed Johnson’s Brexit agreement to keep Northern Ireland tied to the EU’s Single Market - and a handful of pro-EU Conservatives who by then were ready to back a People’s Vote to end the stalemate, the decision to concede a general election was announced and the People’s Vote campaign collapsed.



Edward McMillan-Scott during the People’s Vote rally in October 2019. Over a million people attended to Parliament Square, London

**Edward McMillan-Scott**

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## AI COULD BE WHAT WE WANT IT TO BE

We live in a time when even the European Parliament, the home of democracy, has literally had to close its doors, and open up the possibility for MEPs and staff to work remotely. As European citizens we would like digital data as the source of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to benefit all of us, in our workplace and at home. During the epidemic and lockdown, our lives have continued through digital communication channels. This COVID-19 virus has changed our habits and the way we socialise. Digital Europe is one of the EU's five priorities for the next five years. As digital technology becomes central to every aspect of people's lives, they should be able to trust it. We need to reinvent our mind-set within this digital reality, and to find the positive effects of AI in our daily lives. The European Commission has released its white paper entitled [‘Artificial Intelligence: a European approach to excellence and trust’](#). Parliament has discussed the ethical aspects of AI regulation, and voted on 200 amendments on it. It is important to ensure rigorous

implementation of ethical rules in the healthcare sector.

**“As digital technology becomes central to every aspect of people’s lives, they should be able to trust it. We need to reinvent our mind-set within this digital reality, and to find the positive effects of AI in our daily lives.”**

The response to the recent health crisis has in many ways been mediated by data and information used by AI algorithms to better understand the virus, including tracking its spread. Sharing health data between countries will be essential in the ongoing fight against COVID-19. Data sharing has allowed scientists to exchange genetic sequences from the virus to track how it has spread, enabled doctors to learn how to spot

the symptoms of the disease, and given hospitals the ability to share the best ways of treating the virus.

Coronavirus response measures have accelerated the transition to telework and distance learning by using AI. The majority of jobs in the future will require at least moderate computer skills, which is why the education system needs to be geared to these needs.

There are also some dark sides to AI. Scientists do not have the goal of developing AI for it to be misused. They do not want to create platforms for fake news. Fake news leads to false ideas, and therefore misleads citizens and undermines our democracies.

Privacy and data protection are at risk of cyberattacks, which misuse personal data. As citizens and consumers we are afraid of being under somebody else's control. That's why we need to discuss these matters, to learn, and to build trust between all of us. Not every aspect of our lives can be regulated. But it is possible to develop a sensitive and more ethical society.

We were able to predict the future, but it is actually very difficult to predict what kind of consequences AI will have on our lives. With knowledge, awareness and trust among citizens, with politicians with high ethical standards, artificial intelligence could be what we want it to be.

**Zofija Mazej Kukovič**

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*Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Europe fit for the Digital Age during a meeting of the Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age (AIDA) © European Union 2020 - Source : EP*

## EUROPE 2020, A RENEWED MOMENTUM

How was the European Union's situation in the wake of its enlargement in 2004? An economic market without political power; an original model, constantly being deconstructed by deregulation imposed by a European Commission in thrall to Anglo-Saxon influences; endless disagreements between member countries...

A Europe of contradictory and nationalised migration policies; a Europe that combined deficits, unemployment, social imbalances and lags in innovation;

A 'defenceless' Europe of Defence, which is both faceless and without identity;

A Europe that had never 'Europeanised' but which was, alas, increasingly 'Americanised'.

And 2020 is the evidence that the European Union has changed. For the better!

**“In a few short months, Europe has made a significant leap forward. So much so that we could speak of a ‘European revolution’!”**

Admittedly, a number of events have taken place over the last four years to give rise to this new European impetus: Donald Trump's presidency, heralding the USA's global and European political and military withdrawal, the ascendancy of China and Russia, Brexit, the terrorist threat, the COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention the expansionism of Recep Erdogan.

The EU could have succumbed to

all its ailments and continued in a managed decline and disappearance from the world stage.

But, under the leadership of the '2Ms' – Merkel and Macron, political will was finally expressed and brought to bear against this weakening and to kick-start Europe's recovery.

Is it also true that throughout its history the EU has only advanced in times of crisis, and while crises sometimes make it vulnerable, they have always made it grow.

In a few short months, Europe has made a significant leap forward. So much so that we could speak of a 'European revolution'!

The health crisis that has hit all the Union's countries and the entire world has amplified the feeling of European citizenship, activating solidarity mechanisms between its members to the point of shattering the orthodoxy of budgetary parsimony that used to govern the EU.

This change of direction has given rise to a EUR 750-billion economic, financial and social recovery plan to support Member States in mitigating the pandemic and its consequences; the largest since the Marshall Plan in 1945.

Although health policy falls outside its remit, the Union has decided to set up a dedicated Health Agency and to purchase millions of doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in order to launch a campaign to vaccinate all European citizens in all countries on the same day, 27 December.

In the conflict between Turkey and Greece, the EU showed its solidarity and finally woke up to the reality

of the 'Erdogan threat' in the Mediterranean.

The lengthy, hard-fought Brexit negotiations which ended on Christmas Eve were testament to the determination and unity of the Member States.

In the fight against Islamist terrorism in the Sahel, the establishment and rising strength of 'task force Takuba', made up of special forces from the Member States, is already looking like the precursor of a future European army...

Europe has thus been equal to the challenges of a string of deadly crises that threatened to overcome it.

In order to finally punish the lawless GAFAM for their disgraceful behaviour, on 15 December 2020 the EU published two draft regulations to bring these digital giants to heel, thus drafting a 'European Digital Constitution'.

Admittedly, the hardest part is to yet to come since, from 2021 the EU's people will start to feel the economic, social and financial consequences of COVID-19.

But the months of adversity we have just lived through have been marked by such far-sighted EU decisions that our belief in our European destiny can only be strengthened.

**Michel-Ange Scarbonchi**  
France, ERA, PES, GUE/NGL (1997-1999 & 2001-2004)  
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# FOCUS

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COVID 19



THANKS  
to healthcare  
workers on the  
front lines of COVID-19

# FOCUS

## EUROPE'S RECOVERY PLAN

### The current landscape

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has changed the economic outlook in the European Union and globally, for the years to come. Investments and reforms are needed more than ever to ensure convergence and a sustainable economic recovery. Carrying out reforms and investing in the EU's common priorities, notably green, digital, social and geographical resilience will help create jobs and sustainable growth, while modernizing our economies. Such reform and investment effort will allow the Union to recover in a balanced, forward-looking and sustained manner. The crisis and different national response measures risk increasing regional disparities. Therefore, national recovery plans need to involve regional and local stakeholders and the reflect territorial dimension.

**“The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives (CRII and CRII+) allowed for a prompt emergency response to the crisis. It introduced extraordinary flexibility that facilitated redirecting cohesion resources to the most urgent needs in each Member State: healthcare, workers and small businesses.”**



*Elisa Ferreira during the EP Plenary session on additional resources in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: REACT-EU © European Union 2020 - Source : EP*

### Cohesion policy in action

In spring 2020, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives (CRII and CRII+) allowed for a prompt emergency response to the crisis. It introduced extraordinary flexibility that facilitated redirecting cohesion resources to the most urgent needs in each Member State: healthcare, workers and small businesses. In total, some €20 billion of cohesion policy funding has been re-allocated so far to counter the crisis. As economic activities were seriously affected by the restrictions, the majority of the support (over €11 billion) has been dedicated to helping SMEs stay afloat and cover their bills in a context of dwindling, and often completely cut off, revenues. In Italy alone, business support stands at almost €3 billion, followed by Greece with €1.3 billion. Support to the health sector reached around €7 billion, including for the purchase of ventilators, masks, testing and direct support for people, including workers and vulnerable groups of over €3.2 billion. New measures keep being adopted as the pandemic

challenges persist<sup>1</sup>.

On top of this first-response and to follow up on the emergency support under cohesion funds, REACT-EU, with a budget of €47.5 billion, adds substantial resources to the 2014-2020 cohesion funding. It is financed by the newly agreed 'Next Generation EU', the €750 billion European Recovery Instrument, enabling the EU to raise additional financing on the capital markets to ensure the rebound in the first years following the pandemic. REACT-EU will continue the successful measures under CRII, while bridging the gap to long-term cohesion investments with crisis repair efforts: strengthening the resilience of healthcare systems, preserving and creating employment, especially for young people, supporting the poorest of our society,

1. Updates and detailed information per Member State and type of support are available at the ESIF open data platform in a dedicated CRII dashboard: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/CORONAVIRUS-DASHBOARD-COHESION-POLICY-RESPONSE/4e2z-pw8r/>

and providing working capital and investment support for SMEs.

**“The Commission, through a dedicated Technical Support Instrument, can support Member States in designing and implementing growth enhancing reforms, including building the necessary administrative capacity to do so.”**

REACT-EU will complement the future-proof foundations for the digital and green transitions and a sustainable socio-economic development, supported by the new EU long-term budget of more than €1 trillion, and a €350 billion strong cohesion investment within it. Over the next seven years, the regional development funds will help regions notably reach the green and digital objectives in line with European priorities for climate neutrality and competitiveness, while making sure no one is left behind, with the Just Transition Fund targeting specifically fossil-fuel dependent regions.

#### **Reforms at the heart of recovery**

In close complementarity with the above-described actions, the European Commission stresses the role of reforms for the European recovery through the centrepiece of ‘Next Generation EU’; the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

The RRF consists of large-scale financial support to both investments and reforms, notably supporting the green and digital transition, which make EU countries’ economies more resilient and better



prepared for the future. The support will take the form of up to €672.5 billion in grants and loans. Member States are working on their Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) to access both grants and loans under the RRF. They need to reflect and outline a substantive reform and investment effort, which will improve the Member States’ situation in the following areas:

- Green transition
- Digital transformation
- Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning single market with strong SMEs
- Social and territorial cohesion
- Health, and economic, social and institutional resilience, including with a view of increasing crisis reaction and crisis preparedness
- Policies for the next generation, children and youth, including education and skills

In this effort, it is crucial to ensure that Member States have the necessary institutional and administrative capacity to design and implement such reforms and investments, which are essential to foster resilience and underpin the national, regional and local recovery. The Commission, through a dedicated Technical Support

Instrument, can support Member States in designing and implementing growth enhancing reforms, including building the necessary administrative capacity to do so. It can also support Member States in preparing and implementing the RRPs.

#### **The way ahead**

There is light at the end of the tunnel, as vaccination breakthroughs will allow a gradual protection of Europeans in the coming months. Member States will continue making best use of CRII, REACT-EU, Recovery and Resilience Facility and Technical Support Instrument, so that we emerge stronger from the coronavirus pandemic and move with confidence towards tackling the climate crisis. So that when it comes to telling the story of the EU during the coronavirus pandemic, it will be a story of solidarity, reforms and cohesion, of a moment that facilitated a concerted European effort towards a more prosperous, digitalized and greener Europe.

#### **Elisa Ferreira**

European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms.



## ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES THROUGH COVID 19

The COVID 19 pandemic created a new type of economic crisis. Economists estimate that its magnitude is unseen in Europe over the entire post-war period. First, the crisis was unexpected – as long as nobody considered a pandemic an immediate threat. Second, the crisis hit simultaneously all member states. Hence, it produced a symmetrical shock to the EU economy. However, the effects on the national economies were divergent. Third, the pandemic paralyzed entire economic sectors like transport, tourism and entertainment but boosted others like digital services and home deliveries. Fourth, the uncertainty with the medical solution of the pandemic was transferred into economic uncertainty about the length and the impact of the economic crisis. Fifth, the COVID-19 provoked crisis acts as a powerful change agent and the recovery should not be associated with a return to the pre-crisis situation. The increased use of digital tools will change considerably and for good the nature of work,



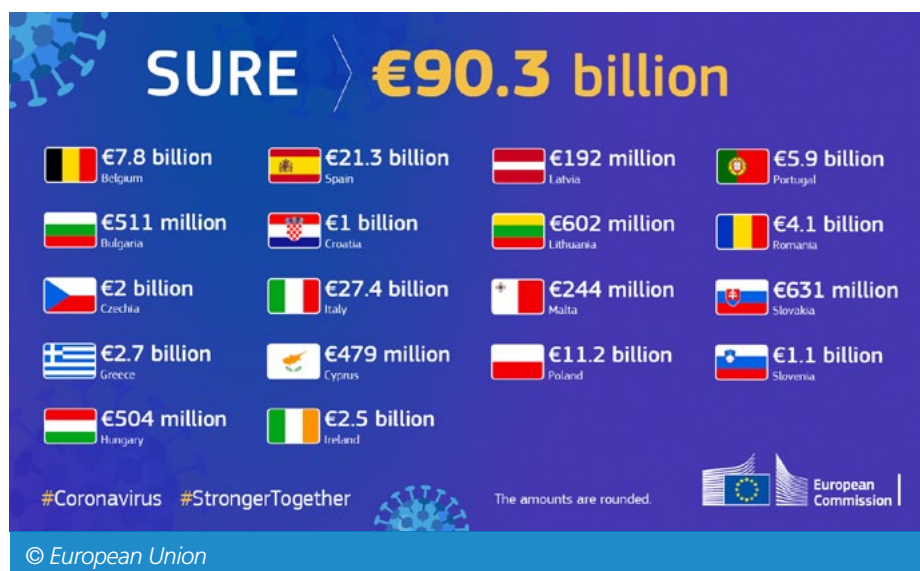
*Closed shops in Brussels during the second lockdown period imposed by the authorities to stop the spread of COVID-19 virus. © European Union 2020*

the personal life as well as public systems like education, health care, administrative services, etc. That implicitly means that overcoming the crisis we should not seek to return to the known but rather to make a leap ahead and prepare the society for the next level of its evolution.

The extraordinary reasons for the crisis required innovative solutions. Measures had to be fast, impactful, common for the EU and forward looking. We still do not know how the pandemic and its consequences

will develop further. Nevertheless, we know much more than in March-April 2020, when the EU leaders and institutions had to react. After accumulating several months of experience, we can now say that the EU reaction to the looming economic and social crisis was timely, massive and well targeted.

**“The increased use of digital tools will change considerably and for good the nature of work, the personal life as well as public systems like education, health care, administrative services, etc.”**



From the outset of the COVID-19 crisis it was clear that governments had to mobilize enormous financial resources to preserve essential production and supply chains and to restrict a sharp increase of unemployment and poverty. Time was of essence. The answer had to be European. The alternative would

## AND THE RECOVERY PLAN

be to use the known tools, to place the effort mainly at national level and as a consequence – to end up with destroyed national economies, sweeping unemployment and poverty. The Eurozone would fall apart and the very existence of the EU would be challenged. Facing these risks, the action at EU level had a clear added value, compared to possible national alternatives.

**“We can now say that the EU reaction to the looming economic and social crisis was timely, massive and well targeted.”**

The EU reaction to the looming economic crisis started already in March with practically lifting all restrictions for government aid and public spending, as well as mobilizing all unspent money from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) expiring at the end of 2020. The government aid for the first two

months from the crisis amounted to 2 trillion euro. The relaxation of the fiscal policies was the fastest way to enable member states to mobilize huge resources for mitigating the first immediate effects of the crisis. These funds were mostly used to save jobs and to preserve some critical levels of income. The consistent policy of European Central Bank and the creation of new instruments like the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE), allowed the member states to successfully mitigate the risks of the increasing interest rate spreads. At the end of 2020 the EU successfully agreed on the next MFF, coupled with a massive recovery plan, both amounting jointly to 1.84 trillion euro. There are three milestones to note in this decision. First, the EU puts at the disposal of the member states a historically unseen amount of money. Second, a substantial part of these funds comes from debt issued by the Commission and ensuring the best possible market conditions. Third, the member states accepted

that the repayment of the debt should be financed by introducing new own resources. These decisions will have a lasting effect on the EU integration.

**“The consistent policy of European Central Bank and the creation of new instruments like the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE), allowed the member states to successfully mitigate the risks of the increasing interest rate spreads.”**

In conclusion, another important fact to note – the unprecedented EU financing will come with strings attached – member states will not have to merely restore and consolidate their economies. They will have to make the leap forward and deliver in achieving the ambitious goals of the Green Deal and the digital transformation. We have to acknowledge that under the pressure of an unprecedented crisis, the EU succeeded to deliver for its citizens.



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## DRUG LANDSCAPE FOR SEVERE COVID-19 DISEASE

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has raised serious global public health concerns. It constitutes a societal and economic emergency across Europe and worldwide, and has resulted in the collapsing of health systems and triggered lasting geopolitical and economic changes, with billions of people being placed under strict lockdown measures. To date, social distancing is the only truly effective solution for stopping the spread of the virus as we wait for vaccination programmes to take effect.

The vast majority of people with COVID-19 are able to recover at home by getting enough rest, staying well hydrated and taking medication such as acetaminophen (also known as paracetamol) to reduce fever and aches and pains. In some countries, the use of bamlanivimab and a combination of casirivimab and imdevimab has obtained emergency use authorisation for people who have not been hospitalised but who



*Prof. Flavia Franconi and Monica Baldi, FMA Board Member*

are at risk of developing severe COVID-19. These drugs may cut down on the risk of hospitalisation and emergency room visits by attacking the virus's spike protein and reducing its ability to attack and enter human cells. One symptom of severe cases of COVID-19 is an abnormal systemic inflammation, or hyper-inflammation, also called 'cytokine storm' (CRS). In fact, one of

the most pressing medical challenges is to minimise the alterations induced by CRS without reducing the effectiveness of therapy. In particular, antiviral immune responses (which involve inflammatory mediators implicated in CRS) are important for the eradication of SARS-CoV-2. Consequently, CRS treatment may not be effective in certain patient subsets if the timing of treatment and the context of the disease are not taken into consideration. Notably, older men experience both a higher severity of COVID-19 and a higher mortality rate than women.

**“To date, social distancing is the only truly effective solution for stopping the spread of the virus as we wait for vaccination programmes to take effect.”**



Inflammatory and infectious diseases largely alter pharmacokinetics,



changing the absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion of medications.

**“Notably, inflammation is more serious in male patients compared to female patients, and, [...], COVID-19 severity and lethality is greater among older men than older women.”**

For example, hypoalbuminemia may increase the serum concentrations of free drug in relation to the daily dose, leading to overmedication. In addition, inflammation also downregulates numerous enzymes that metabolise the drug. In animals, the effects of inflammation on enzymes appears to be sex and enzyme dependent, while we still do not know if sex has an influence on

this process in humans.

Unfortunately, no specific drugs are available to fight this pandemic, despite desperate development efforts. A different form of drug discovery has therefore been put into practice: existing medications have been repurposed or repositioned in an effort to shorten research times and reduce costs, including on pharmacokinetic testing and studies of safety profiles.

Therefore, we wonder:

1. if the drug kinetic obtained in healthy individuals or in patients without a massive inflammatory reaction is transferable to patients with COVID-19;
2. and if drug repurposing has the effect of perpetuating the gender gap in medicine. Although things are slowly changing, clinical trials are still heavily male-biased. This means that there are large gaps in the information available about women, while there are relatively few cases where information is missing

for men (see for example drugs for autoimmune diseases). Notably, inflammation is more serious in male patients compared to female patients, and, as mentioned above, COVID-19 severity and lethality is greater among older men than older women.

It is therefore possible to speculate that this could contribute to generating sexual dimorphism in the pharmacokinetics of COVID-19 treatments. Looking at clinical trials for COVID-19, it emerges that gender is scarcely considered, despite: i) the fact that the severity of the disease and the mortality rate are higher among older men than older women; ii) known sex differences in immune function; iii) sex differences in pharmacokinetic parameters. In addition, breastfeeding and pregnant women were not included in vaccine trials. However, mRNA COVID-19 vaccines can safely be administered to pregnant and breastfeeding women, according to the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. In my opinion, the COVID-19 emergency can also give rise to new opportunities if the choice is made to apply a gender approach to research and clinical practices, in order to optimise care for all.

#### DID YOU KNOW..?

Before approval, all vaccines in the EU are evaluated against the same high standards as any other medicine.

What is different for COVID-19 vaccines is that speed of development and potential approval is much faster [due to the public health emergency](#).

EMA has put in place a dedicated expert task force and rapid review procedures to evaluate high-quality applications from companies in the shortest possible timeframes, while ensuring robust scientific opinions.

The European Commission makes use of all existing flexibilities to accelerate the approval of any potential vaccines for use across the EU, but this is only possible if EMA receives sound scientific evidence establishing that a vaccine's benefits are greater than any risks.

You can find more information on the page of the [European Medicine Agency](#).

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## PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

The virus has changed the lives of everyone in the EU - massively, suddenly and in ways we certainly did not want. These three hallmarks of a crisis - it was unforeseeable, it is unmanageable, and it has undesirable consequences - lead to extreme feelings of loss of control. Shocking images from hospitals are seared into the collective European memory. The pandemic, which has had a disastrous impact on most people's lives, can be seen as a collective trauma.

**“National health services must ensure that therapy appointments can be made quickly and easily. Likewise, hospital staff must be given the opportunity to deal with traumatic experiences and stress-related disorders as soon as possible.”**

Since February 2020, basic human needs (autonomy, a sense of social belonging and the feeling of being in control of one's life) have gone unmet, leaving many with severe psychological problems. The necessary restrictions on social contacts are loosening vital bonds with family, friends and work colleagues. This is particularly evident in people who live alone or who already suffer from a mental illness or an addiction. The risk of relapse is particularly high for those who have already gone through a withdrawal.



For many of us, the social networks which keep us anchored have broken down in recent months. More people are already seeking therapy. Many patients who had already undergone treatment are relapsing. We can be sure that over the next 12 to 24 months more people will develop psychological disorders. Social distancing and hygiene rules, but also existential fears, are factors in the increased prevalence of social phobias, compulsive washing, depression and generalised anxiety disorders. In fact, mental illnesses are well treatable. Therapeutic help should therefore be sought at an early stage, so that they do not become chronic and develop into long-term incapacity for work. National health services must ensure that therapy appointments can be made quickly and easily. Likewise, hospital staff must be given the opportunity to deal with traumatic experiences and stress-related disorders as soon as possible.

**“Society is being forced to deal with the phenomenon of increasingly ruthless self-centredness. Many believe that they are entitled to have all their own needs met immediately - with no regard for the consequences for others.”**

Autonomy, our second basic need, is also being severely undermined by the COVID restrictions. In the last few months, our everyday lives have been severely circumscribed. In recent decades, more and more importance has come to be placed on freedom and individuality in the EU - a welcome trend. Unfortunately, this development also has its downsides.

For example, society is being forced to deal with the phenomenon of increasingly ruthless self-centredness. Many believe that they are entitled to have all their own needs met immediately - with no regard for the consequences for others. If this trend is to be reversed, public debate about ways of reconciling freedom and responsibility is essential. Climate change triggered just such a debate, but COVID has put any new-found consensus to a severe test. These issues facing society are certain to become more controversial in the coming years.

Although lockdown experiences vary greatly depending on a range of factors (housing, mental strength, job security, etc.), our entire way of interacting with others has changed and we have seen at first hand just how vulnerable our society is. The threat to our own livelihoods and our own lives has become a collective experience.

Every day seems to bring new changes and restrictions, the world is upside down, there are no quick fixes in sight. Many people are unable to cope with this - feelings of uncertainty have become even more pronounced. Crises act like a catalyst: the underlying discontents in a society are magnified and come to the surface.

**“Many are drawn to conspiracy theories as a way of regaining a sense of security and control.”**

The unease prompted by reports of the increasing number of people who have lost their job or their business will continue to grow in the coming months. Some will find the return to school or university

difficult. Sufficient resources must be made available to ward off long-term problems and offer people hope for the future.

This is as true for society as a whole as it is for the individual. During a crisis, our self-confidence is put to the test. Those who were already unsure of themselves lose their way, become fearful and judgmental. Frustrations and fears are often eased by meeting and talking to others, but that is not currently possible. The danger that people will find everyday life too much and give in to anti-social behaviour is all the greater, therefore. Many are drawn to conspiracy theories as a way of regaining a sense of security and control. If people are to endure the severe

restrictions and lockdowns, and if public support for these measures is not to be forfeited, politicians must communicate transparently and clearly. Willingness to abide by the rules, despite the psychological burdens involved, is contingent on the purpose of a measure being readily understandable. Even if the vaccines bring a return to something much more like normality, the consequences of the pandemic will be with us to the end of the decade.

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## NUTRITION AND COVID-19

To sum up briefly, COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is here to stay. This means that it will be as much a part of our future as climate change will be. One hundred per cent of the population is susceptible to coronavirus infection. Our immune system has to be at its best. Not only does being overweight or obese make us propitiatory victims of the virus; a poor diet can also 'tire out' the immune system itself. It is important to understand the relationship between diet and the immune system, to protect it from infectious diseases, which we can do throughout our lives, to keep the immune system on 'high alert'.

**“Our immune system has to be at its best. Not only does being overweight or obese make us propitiatory victims of the virus; a poor diet can also ‘tire out’ the immune system itself.”**



© European Union 2021 - Source : EP

What does the immune system have to do with nutrition? A lot. More than 75% of the immune system is generated in the gut, where the intestinal microbiota, with its 2 trillion 'workers' (microbes), transforms food into molecules useful for nourishing the cells of the immune system, the main agents of three basic tools: immunoglobulins, cytokines and antibodies, responsible for blocking the infiltration of assailants

or destroying them, including the coronavirus, of course.

**“It is important to understand the relationship between diet and the immune system, to protect it from infectious diseases, which we can do throughout our lives, to keep the immune system on ‘high alert’.”**



Dr Carlos Enrique Rodríguez Jiménez and Former EP and FMA President, Enrique Barón Crespo

A balanced, high-quality diet is obviously essential, as it provides the raw materials for the development of a strong microbiota. By contrast, a diet of dubious origin or an unrestricted, meagre or unbalanced diet alters the production of these molecules, which are useful to the immune cell team:

- A protein shortage/excess
- An excess of refined sugars and saturated fats

- A deficiency of high-quality fats
  - Alcohol abuse
  - Low water and vegetable intake
- In what proportion should these nutrients be consumed? A balance of 40-50% carbohydrates, 20-30% proteins and 30% fats of marine or vegetable origin, essentially, would be highly recommendable.

**“A proper food and supplement plan mitigates COVID-19, or keeps it in the 18% of mild to moderate cases.”**

What is more, catering for the immune system not only involves defending against or attacking intruders but also plays an extremely important role in slowing down or speeding up ageing.

A good diet, without a shadow of a doubt, equips the body to overcome a host of obstacles; this fact is irrefutable and can make the life of any 'beast' very difficult. If we add supplements considered immunostimulants to that, the likelihood of their removal increases considerably. A proper food and supplement plan mitigates COVID-19, or keeps it in the 18% of mild to moderate cases.

- o What to keep in stock: blue fish, shellfish, eggs, yoghurt, lean meat and vegetables; homemade bone broth; olive oil; vegetables, rice, nuts; fruit, particularly citrus fruits and berries; plenty of water
- o Multivitamins and minerals, with zinc, iron, copper, selenium, etc.
- o Vitamin C: 1-2 grams
- o B vitamins: 50 milligrams
- o Omega 3: 2-4-6 grams
- o Vitamin E: 400 IUs
- o immunocompetent probiotics
- o Concentrated amino acids, on an



Farm to fork strategy on sustainable food ©European Union 2021 - Source : EP

empty stomach, one dessertspoonful in water

- o AMPK500: 1-2 pills
  - o Plenty of water, ideally with lemon
  - o Enough physical exercise is desirable, no less than 30 minutes' walking a day
  - o Sleep for 7-8 hours at night
  - o No stress under any circumstances
- What about wine? 'Wine is the thinking person's health drink'! In a situation that requires a perfect 'balance' of any toxic or foreign substance, it is not advisable to feed the liver on too much alcohol. Have a maximum of two good glasses of wine a day (200 ml). Avoid spirits. Remedies and vaccines will have to be updated 'once tomorrow is over'. What will never be over is what we have done for our mental and physical constitutions. We must diligently keep our own 'houses', our bodies, in order with the aim of strengthening our immunity, without slipping into hyperbole. Stress decreases the number of white blood cells that help to combat infection. The lower their level, the greater the risk of infection. What is more, exercise gives your immune

system a double boost:

- It helps the release of stress hormones, and
- it improves natural immune defence activity.

In short, a decent lifestyle has been my main weapon in my battle to overcome a severe bout of COVID-19:

- An agile and rational mind
- Consistent physical exercise
- Garden, sea and farm

IF IN DOUBT, SPEAK TO A DOCTOR!

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## OVERVIEW OF THE PANDEMIC

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially declared the existence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The whole world crumbled in shock.

**“The COVID-19 pandemic has proved through a series of events that saw our lives change in an instant, wiping out our normal activities, projects and plans.”**

Why did this actually happen?

We, as people of the third millennium, live in a privileged era compared to previous generations. The evolution of human ingenuity and creativity, from basic sciences to medicine, has led us to believe, or perhaps to the illusion, that we know all about not just natural phenomena but also our own bodies and minds. We have statistics and risk factors that enable us to predict – according to those who compile them – any



COVID-19 - Scientific staff manipulate the samples and use various medical instruments.  
©Courtesy of GSK - European Union 2020 - Source : EP

event, from economic crisis to the possibility of suffering a heart attack. It seemed to us that these rigid forecasting models could cover every eventuality.

Was this actually the case? Not at all – the COVID-19 pandemic has proved this through a series of events that saw our lives change in an instant, wiping out our normal activities, projects and plans.

After decades of worrying about the

danger of increasingly destructive weapons, we have been brought to our knees, if not to say humiliated, by a tiny virus.

**“The European Union has had a crucial say in the matter considering that, while the management of health systems is the responsibility of individual countries, prevention is a uniquely European responsibility.”**



ENVI Committee - Exchange of views with Emer COOKE, Executive Director of the European Medicines Agency ©European Union 2021 - Source : EP

Our health systems have all sunk under extreme pressure, especially those in countries that have cut costs in recent years. In some countries, doctors have been forced to make drastic choices due to a lack of resources: deciding who should live and who should not, upending every rule of bioethics. We have learnt the hard way how vital prevention investments are and how they must be boosted. On this point, the



European Union has had a crucial say in the matter considering that, while the management of health systems is the responsibility of individual countries, prevention is a uniquely European responsibility. Through the Healthy Gateways programme, the EU has been the first in the world to publish guidelines for restarting cruises during the COVID-19 emergency, which has helped relaunch a key sector of the tourism industry as a whole, while the EU has been the role model for the maritime industry worldwide and for the National Maritime Health Associations. The WHO, on the other hand has appeared slow to react to events, so much so that this prompted a backlash from its main backer (the USA). Let us hope that President Biden will now reconsider Trump's decision to freeze that funding.

**“Psychological balance is now more difficult than ever to maintain, precisely because of the gap between science and chance, between the belief that we can control everything and the ability to accept the unexpected.”**

While institutions and governments have tried with all their might to tackle the pandemic and help people through this difficult period, the same cannot be said for some media outlets. In fact, the spread of conflicting news has created considerable confusion as to whether or not to use masks, the right way to treat the virus, and the testing



and composition of vaccines. This has led to the emergence of a 'No Vax' movement in several countries, whose members began by denying the very existence of the virus and are now refusing to get vaccinated. This is of fundamental importance because it is liable to compromise the swift vaccination of the 70% of the population who would then also protect all the others. The possibility of making vaccination compulsory should therefore be considered, as has happened in the past with smallpox, for example. In fact, as we have seen, physical borders do not prevent the spread of the virus and in many European countries there are a significant number of cross border workers in epidemiological terms. The idea of issuing a health passport granting total freedom to travel could act as a genuine incentive to ensure that even the most hardened doubters get vaccinated. Science and government regulations get us thus far. However, what about the equally important psychological impact of the Pandemic? If, as we have seen, a tiny virus can

turn our lives upside down at any moment, how can we best calmly deal with its effects? Psychological balance is now more difficult than ever to maintain, precisely because of the gap between science and chance, between the belief that we can control everything and the ability to accept the unexpected. I would like to remind you of the words of Victor von Weizsacker, father of psychosomatic medicine: 'There is no physics classroom anywhere in the world where mechanics does not define the concept of force as the product of mass and acceleration. There is no such classroom for the concept of life.' This reopens one of the most interesting debates of modern times: how to reconcile science and instinct, intellect and wisdom, medicine and philosophy – or in other words, mind and heart!

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## QUARANTINE ON SYROS ISLAND

For the last 30 years I have been spending my summer holidays in my cottage in Chroussa, on the island of Syros. Every summer! In July last year, after the first wave of the pandemic, I travelled from Athens to Syros, determined to stay until the 'second summer' in October. Never would I have imagined that I would be spending the whole winter here, too... Chroussa is a beautiful, green, quiet, traditional village, with around 100 permanent inhabitants out of a total of 20 000 on Syros. Built on sunny hills, surrounded by gardens with fruit trees, olive groves, aromatic plants and many conifers, for many years it was a favourite resort for the residents of Ermoupoli, the island's capital, when the beaches were not so popular. Located 2 km from the sandy beach of Vari, it overlooks the Archipelago and affords views over Mykonos, Delos, Paros and Antiparos. In the evening, the passenger liners, the fishing boats, the fireflies, the nightingales and the lights of the neighbouring islands create a magical atmosphere. Chroussa is also a special place for walking, jogging and exploring the mysterious pathways, streams and

cobbled streets, and is a paradise for migratory birds. Here, one can relax, lulled by the sounds of nature. There are no tavernas, bars or supermarkets. Nothing to disturb the calm and tranquillity. Yet there are plenty of shops selling everything, cultural events, museums, a hospital, sports and services in Ermoupoli and medieval Ano Syros, which is only 8 km away. That is, when they are not all closed because of the lockdown... Apart from its favourable Mediterranean climate and tranquillity, it is renowned for the longevity of its residents. So far there have been zero cases of the coronavirus! It is as if the Aegean is protecting us from the scourge of the pandemic. You can see why I had a good reason to stay when the second outbreak occurred in Athens at the beginning of October. I easily adapted to the new circumstances. With the help of technology and frequent communication with my loved ones, I feel fine, safe and healthy. In addition, the company of my beloved cat does not allow for boredom or loneliness to set in! My home has all amenities and, above all, a very good library, which

is constantly enriched and updated with new e-orders delivered to my door. I read a lot, attend online conferences, listen to music and am writing a book about the 200 years since the Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire in 1821. I am writing about the silent contribution of women to the struggle for liberation and the building of a modern Greek State.

I also cook healthy food and do pilates, a little gardening and an hour of hiking to control my blood pressure every day. Once a week I visit the supermarket. I wear a mask and socially distance myself from others. At Christmas, there was one more person at the table. And on New Year's Eve I was invited to a dinner for four!

I am not a fan of television, nor do I waste my time on social media. But now, I have finally found two good TV programmes to watch apart from the news: the French documentary 'Des Trains', with the amazing Philippe Gougler, and an Australian series, 'A place to call home'. To sum up, I feel privileged to be in Syros. I must confess that I am now able to appreciate my cottage for the first time, free from the guilt I felt after spending all my money building it given the financial crisis. And now I'm considering living here permanently! May 2021 be the best year for everyone, with no quarantine!

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Syros island - Greece ©AdobeStock

# FMA ACTIVITIES



European Parliament Former Members Association  
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# TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE EUROPEAN WAY?

The Artificial Intelligence revolution brings unique opportunities to help improve every citizen's life and new (unknown) threats. In the last decade, there has been an explosion in AI's progress and applications in our society. AI and digital technologies have profoundly changed how we organise and live our lives. We have seen and see its positive and negative uses in a multitude of settings.

What is more paradoxical is that the more successful - more straightforward to use - the application of AI-based systems is, the more becomes invisible. Citizens become skilled and avid users, but unaware of the real functioning of the technology at hand. This situation makes it simpler to control users who are satisfied with the technology and are unconcerned about what is possible to do, at all times, of their personal data and the aggregations of these with those of



a multitude of other users, almost every citizen probably know that their data is being collected, stored and analysed. Agencies and governments are also aware of these abuses, but their responses are either slow and not very forceful or are entirely non-existent.

Indeed, the GDPR and the HLEG-AI guidelines for a trustworthy and human-centric AI help change this situation in the European context. Among the many transformations

caused by AI-based technologies in the global economy, none is more salient than Internet platforms' growth, already dominant before the COVID-19 pandemic, have become even more prevailing during it, as so much of ordinary life is moving online.

In this changing scenario, AI is becoming part of our lives, dissecting and analysing them and deciding what would be best for each individual in every situation, even if we do not explicitly request those services. The way these companies govern the information flows and their economic capacity pose newer threats to a well-functioning democracy. It is also true that the citizen response to this domination is novel and, sometimes, use those same infrastructures to organise and give collective answers, long before governments. Given the wide variety of technologies subsumed under the term AI and the lack of common knowledge about the full extent of its potential impact on fundamental rights, the legal definition of AI-related terms might need to be assessed regularly. Companies and



The Moderator Brian Maguire with FMA President, Hans-Gert Pöttering and some speakers of the event Dr. Elda Brogi, Maryia Sadouskaya-Komlach, Guillaume Klossa, Dr. Peter Kreko, Michal Boni, Žiga Turk and Ulises Cortés



governments must use a simple, clear and precise language that allows the user to understand the real implications of using an intelligent tool and the legal protections that the state guarantees. Until today, prior impact assessments of AI-based systems mainly focus on technical issues. These assessments rarely address potential effects on fundamental rights or the environment. Human oversight is not an option when using AI-based technologies if it impacts living beings or the environment. AI has no moral or legal responsibility, but humans have. Therefore, I urge policymakers and the scientific community to embrace and address these challenges from an ethical perspective as readily as they are exploring the fascinating and exciting new uses of AI-based systems. A

trustworthy AI may help our societies achieve fair digital well-being by improving the services in critical areas such as knowledge and science, health and healthcare, education and employment, governance and social development, and media and entertainment. It is precisely the confirmation of digital illiteracy among citizens, which multiplies the ethical responsibility of those who have the technical or legal capacity to regulate AI, doing nothing to overcome this condition is in itself an act of great irresponsibility since it leaves a large part of the population defenceless against possible abuses. In this scenario, to achieve technological sovereignty in Europe, Digital and Technical Education for all citizen is a must. We need society to become fluent in AI, and our political and

economic leaders well-versed in an AI transformation's disruptive powers. One step forward, in this direction, is to advance the digitisation of primary schools and teachers. Preparing citizens for life in this digital ecosystem implies developing, among other goals, to accomplish the essential competencies for understanding and making use of digital technologies, not only as a toolbox of skills and abilities of a technical nature but as a blend of behaviours, specialised knowledge, technical knowledge, humanistic knowledge, work habits, arrangements and overall critical thinking.

We have to ensure - governments must be the first in this effort - that the population is digitally literate and uses digital technologies consciously and responsibly, this is not a unique need for AI-based tool users. Digital literacy is needed to assure that the European core democratic values also apply in the digital age.

### Ulises Cortés

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## TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION CALLS FOR POLITICAL INNOVATION



The history of civilization is about improving collaboration among an increasing number of thinking people. For collaboration trust is essential. Among relatives and acquaintances, trust came naturally. But we have few of those. Complex projects require collaboration among strangers. Institutions emerged that facilitated that. The market is such an institution for economic collaboration. The political market - democracy – has been an efficient institution for the general collaboration of individuals about public matters.

Both political and economic markets are built around an individual. More collectivist systems too organize the use of brains and muscles of many people, however, in market driven economies and in democracies all individuals are invited to think differently, originally.

Theological invention of the individual, the weakening of kin based institutions, and emergence of institutions that encouraged collaboration among these individually thinking persons resulted in the industrial and scientific revolution of the West. Western society is optimized for innovation. But it is not so well prepared for obedience. This difference shows in the very different success between the East and the West in containing

the COVID pandemic. The East contained it as people were obeying the measures. The West did not. But invented a number of vaccines. The difference also showed in different economic success of socialist and capitalist Europe after the 2nd World War. In the socialist one only a few were allowed to think.

Human institutions essentially use communication to connect the elements together. Therefore, any kind of collaborative organization depended on the available communication technology. In ancient Greece, for example, democracy was limited to the men that could gather at a square and would hear the speaker. Democracy as we know it - with rule of law, due process, informed electorate etc. – depends on the communication technology of printing.

Digital communication technology is providing new ways to communicate. New kinds of collaborations and institutions are becoming possible. It would be wrong to assume that it does not enable new political institutions. Some 500 years ago printed press made feudalism uncompetitive. Feudalism too was a system for enabling peaceful collaboration, creating trust between the various layers of society. But democracy was better. Digital will make democracy obsolete. At least

the kind of democracy that was written into the constitutions by the founding fathers in the context of paper based communication technology.

It is important the Europe remains innovative in the development of democratic institutions, as it has always been. The strength of Europe - in comparison with the civilizations to the East - were not just the competition among individuals. It was also the competition among political entities. Contrary to Islam or China, Europe was rarely a monolithic block. It was broken into several entities. Europe has always been strong when its entities were competing with each other – be it Greek city states, Renaissance Italian towns, trading ports of the Hanseatic league or the Atlantic powers conquering the world.

To paraphrase Sir Roger Scruton, *Europeans were always competing with each other yet they always knew they had something in common – their Judeo-Christian heritage*. This combination of unity and diversity is also a receipt for our future. Unity in core values and diversity in the freedom to explore, to try differently, to learn from each other, and to move forward.

### Žiga Turk

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## MEDIA, INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY IN EU

Identifying the main trends in the media in Europe, and the trends at policy level too, has increasingly become a challenge, considering the complexity of the current media environment, due to the advent of the Internet.

The “digital revolution” has undoubtedly created positive developments, the possibility to cheaply produce and share information on a large scale, amplifying the choices of the users as well as boosting new business models based on the new digital ecosystem. It has also spurred the progressive blurring of boundaries between established media and communication industries, based on which similar services, that in the past could have been distributed only by predefined platforms, now can be distributed using multiple digital technologies. Nowadays, in comparison with this recent past, new actors have assumed functions in the production and distribution process of media services which, until recently, had been performed only (or mostly) by traditional media organisations; a number of

“intermediaries” play essential roles in determining the influence of media’s outreach. Services provided by these new actors have become essential to find information, and at times, turn these intermediaries into gatekeepers playing an active and consequential role in mass communication processes. These services have complemented and even replaced traditional media actors, both on the consumption side – changing the way in which people access the news – and on the production side – disrupting the legacy media’s business model, based on advertising, thanks to the capability to collect data and micro-target the messages. Consequently, the role of the new intermediaries in influencing the public opinion has grown.

The digital disruption has affected the notion of media pluralism too. The “new media” environment is characterized by audience segmentation, the proliferation of personalized information services, and an algorithmic-driven communication based on consumer profiling. While it is widely acknowledged that a plural media environment is needed to ensure the integrity of democratic processes, what type of communication can be considered relevant to public discourse, and what should be measured when assessing the level of pluralism of the digital media environment, in the new fragmented digital environment?

All these developments matter in a policy perspective and have an impact on democracy, on the weight of different constitutional powers, on the integrity of democratic

procedures, including elections, that are, in the end, the core and substance of democracy itself. The extraordinary evolution of audio-visual and communication services caused by the technological development has created the conditions for a wider European intervention and jurisdiction in this broader field. The challenge is to define a new EU regulatory framework that complies with human right standards and the rule of law: the path has to be defined now under the proposal for a Digital Services Act and with the Democracy Action Plan published by the EC in December 2020. This path is relevant to define an EU policy, but also to contribute to the international debate on the role of digital intermediaries, on how to protect freedom of expression online, on what type of governance to envisage for digital platforms, in order to embrace the huge advantages of innovation, preserving and fostering the fundamental features of a democratic society.



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## DEMOCRACY, MEDIA, POLITICS

**There are many threats for democracy in the current times.**

Some of them come from the digital world and tools (unbelievable development of social media with unintended consequences) - and very often can lead to the lack of real debates, because all groups formed in the network are closed in their bubbles, extremely polarised, acting in the tribal modes. In addition - there is a lack of real, powerful and credible fact-checking platforms supporting the fight against the disinformation. But, first of all the key reason is linked to the populism and the neo-authoritarian ways of governing in some countries. The democracy and the democratic rules are undermined.

**The real recovery of the democracy is obviously needed.**

It is crucial to keep all democratic rules: as the rule of law, full independence of the judiciary system and the media independence and pluralism, which are fundamental as a democratic tool for civic watchdog views and the paramount instrument for democracy - open dialogue. On the one side it requires the media (also digital media) literacy, on the

other it is related to the transparent media market and the special role of the public media, which should be impartial.

**The experience of the Polish situation can be important as a very special lesson.**

From 2016 Polish public media are completely dependent on the ruling party and became the tool for propaganda and manipulation. There is no possibility for representatives of the opposition groups or real civic society organisations to present their view on many issues without ideological comments done by journalists as a special "propaganda officers". There is no possibility to explain the social and political processes in the impartial way. The messages are totally simplified, based on emotions and the dominant perspective done by the populists. Those messages create the polarised society, which is a real danger for democracy when the extreme polarisation stops any dialogue between various social groups. Additionally, there is no transparent oversight of the public media - the National Media Council was established as political body, strictly dependent on decisions of the ruling party leaders.

Last weeks, the state owned company ("Orlen" - the petroleum company) bought the "Polska Press" conglomerate from the "Verlagsgroupe". By this business decision (with clear political intention) just about 24 regional daily newspapers, 120 weekly newspapers, 500 websites - addressed to 17,2 millions people will start with new, as many predict, content and power of ideological

influence. The 17 millions records also can be used in the future for the political, manipulative micro-targeting, for instance during electoral campaigns.

**The citizens empowerment is necessary if we want to recover the democracy.**

For this purpose it is essential: to help citizens to be informed properly and make informed decisions, to give and guarantee the citizens a real participation and influence on decision making processes.

Concluding: to recover the democracy we need the traditional media - as an independent, free, pluralistic, and especially the public media under the direction of the impartiality principle. But in the modern world there is a new phenomenon - people are living in the hybrid offline and online sphere. It means that we ought to consider the significance of social media and networks for the democracy development. To counteract against disinformation becomes the crucial challenge as - at the same time to change the functionalities of algorithms leading us to the bubbles and echo-chambers groups. And, of course - we need alternative solutions for citizens to communicate, not only under the Big Tech control.

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*Michał Boni and Ulises Cortés during the event*

# FORMER MEMBERS NETWORK

*The FMA, as full Member of the European Association of Former Parliamentarians (FP-AP), supports the “Appeal for Democracy and Dialogue” an initiative taken jointly with our American and Canadian partners.*



*European association of former members of parliament of the member states of the Council of Europe*



*Former Members of Congress of the United States of America*



*Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians*

## Appeal for Democracy and Dialogue

We, the FMC, Former Members of Congress of the United States of America, the European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament and the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians are deeply concerned about recent attacks on democracy in America and dangerous tendencies in Europe.

Conspiracy theories, unprecedented baiting against the results of democratic elections, spread of fake news despite clear evidence, the misuse of fears of an invisible pandemic and the culmination through a brutal and violent mob put the fragile democracy at risk.

Our common democratic values are under threat. Democracy is an ideal as well as a goal, based on fundamental values shared by many open-minded peoples on the planet, regardless of cultural, political, social or economic differences.

It is the prerequisite for rule of law, the respect of human rights and the protection of the weak ones in our societies. It is the guarantor of inviolability of human dignity, freedom, gender equality, tolerance, freedom of religious belief, respect for minorities, cultural diversity, and peace.

We, former lawmakers from the USA and Europe are therefore forging an “Appeal for Democracy and Dialogue”.

Democracy is our highest value. Democracy is not the rule of the majority over the minority; true democracy is based on dialogue.

We commit ourselves to defend democracy whenever and wherever it is at risk and to closely cooperate for this aim. We invite all associations of former parliamentarians to join the Appeal for Democracy and Dialogue.

The patrons of the Appeal will carefully watch the global development of democracy. Our task is to raise our warning voice if we will see dialogue diminishing and democracy at stake.

Paris, 29-01-2021

Rune Rydén  
PRESIDENT FP-AP

Washington, 05-02-2021

Dr. Charles Boustany  
PRESIDENT FMC

Ottawa, 05-02-2021

Dorothy Dobbie  
PRESIDENT CAF/ACEP



# EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

## A FRIDAY NIGHT IN CHICAGO

Early evening hours in Brussels, people start to sit down to their dining tables, but in some homes, online conference platforms are just warming up. It's noon in Chicago, and students of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign gathered at the University's European Union Centre to discuss the issue of climate policy and technology with former MEPs. Together with Hans-Olaf Henkel (DE) we share our views on the EU climate targets, the cost of the energy transition, the importance of technology in this shift, the controversial role of nuclear energy in decarbonization, carbon leakage, the European Green Deal, the green mainstreaming of the next MFF and many more.

After a short introduction of the two speakers and moderator Dr Peter Christensen, an environmental economist in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences by EU Centre director Dr Emmanuel Rota, "The New Speed of Politics: Technology and Sustainability in the EU" event sails to open waters. We agree that the most important characteristic

of the recent Commission climate proposal is its ambitious target at a 55% level by 2030: it is a real breakthrough compared to the previous EU ambitions. Still, there are different views on the importance of such political targets: do they truly represent a major driving force in Europe's decarbonization, or it is finally up to the business sector to perform practical emission cuts, and targets are rather political slogans? Green and ECR positions clearly go to different directions.

Dr Henkel gives more trust to actions and innovation by economic actors. I argue that innovation, technological development and practical emission cuts are rather triggered by political decisions, strategies and programmes.

Renewable energy market comes up in the discussion as an example: decades of maintained support and commitment by governments and the EU took as to the present situation where renewables have become the cheapest and most competitive energy sources, making the switch to a sustainable energy system economically rationale to

the industry as well. Other clashes of views appear around the role of nuclear energy in decarbonization, its costs and inherent risks. But a clearly visible disagreement is experienced about technology as a solution itself. Technology is clearly essential, but alone is not able to bring us the answer to the challenge of climate change. We need more profound, systemic changes in our societies, economies, in the way of our lives, in the architecture of our trade systems, transport networks or agriculture – I argue. But a common platform is found again when it comes to the issue of the next MFF and the New Generation EU programme. It is clear that both financial frameworks should finance to achieve the climate and sustainability targets of the EU, the decarbonization of the world's biggest single market by 2050. The lively one hour debate passed quickly with excellent moderation and questions, presenting two different, but well-argued positions on the issue. The event was followed by a separate workshop one week later with some interested students where I had the opportunity to discuss additional subjects including global climate negotiations, links between business and sustainability as well as my personal experiences as national MP in Hungary compared to my time in the European Parliament. Thanks to the University of Illinois for the invitation, and I hope students got closer to understand ongoing debates in the EU.



*Benedek Javor and Hans-Olaf Henkel during their participation in the online conference of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*

**Benedek Javor**

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## THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

It was a great pleasure giving a lecture for the University of Colorado Boulder European Union Centre of Excellence on the European Green Deal. Testing structural challenges are reshaping our world. The climate crisis is without any doubt the most threatening. We see the planet continuing to get dangerously hotter and know that no action will come at a very high cost, even threatening human life on earth. It also has clearly the potential to significantly affect all sectors of the economy as technological disruptions and regulatory interventions will result in stranded assets, new players entering the markets and others disappearing. I therefore used this opportunity to emphasise that the Green Deal is actually about much more than reducing emissions to address the global warming and its increasingly devastating effects. Indeed, it has been positioned as the EU's flagship initiative around which the other priorities should be aligned to ensure consistency. Furthermore, we see this transformation of our economy not only as a difficult challenge.

Rebooting our economy by making it climate neutral and circular can also create new opportunities, trigger innovation, entrepreneurship and technological revolutions. It could also increase the quality of life in our neighbourhoods and address inequality issues altogether. Achieving a more sustainable world, however, will require far-reaching societal change, engaging all actors of the society. To have a real and meaningful impact, change will have to be systemic, across the key systems that define the way we live, work, eat, travel and move our goods. Hence the very broad policy agenda that is being rolled out. Even though the design of the broader narrative and the building blocks look like a top-down exercise, it is only going to happen with the support at all policy-levels and by all actors of society. This requires a multi-level and multi-stakeholders approach, bringing together different actors across value chains and silo's. That's why it is crucial to work with businesses, policymakers at all levels,



civil society, networking organisations and citizens, that aspire to create a lasting impact and want to achieve a more sustainable world by rethinking business models, making policies futureproof, or by addressing unsustainable behaviour.

I applied this thinking to a recently adopted strategy, the Renovation Wave, to make the agenda concrete and tangible. Questions and comments from the audience focused very much on how we achieved in Europe a broad consensus on the way forward, and how we can address resistance to change. We also discussed the implications for the financial system, an issue that is being addressed through the sustainable finance agenda in the EU.



*Saïd El Khadraoui during his participation at the event of University of Colorado Boulder European Union Centre of Excellence*

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## ZOOMING IN



*Michael Hindley during his participation at the event of York University*

In May I took part in my first “zoom” seminar for the FMA with Ilia State University, Tbilisi. The event itself was novel and enjoyable and the students were well informed and eager questioners in excellent English. For my part, I was pleased to have the opportunity of extending my range of communications skills. Since then I have participated in a “webinar” for the FMA with York University, Toronto. In addition have a “zoom” with the Euro Culture Masters programme at Göttingen University, a contact originally facilitated by the FMA.

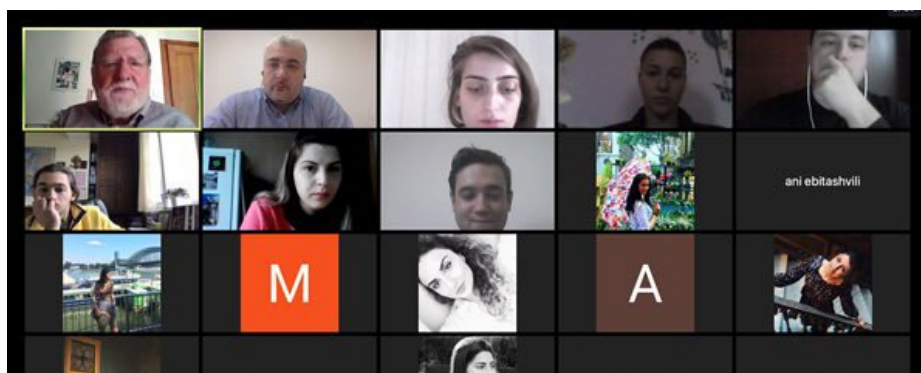
When I was first elected as MEP in 1984, I thought I was being resourceful by taking a portable type writer to my Brussels office and

another one to my Strasbourg office. I also took a transistor radio to both offices to keep up with the news. But then came the fax machine, then pagers, then mobile phones, and by the time I left Parliament in 1999 our offices had enough new technology to control a space shuttle. My latest smart phone is an office in my pocket.

Previously when I have accepted an invitation on behalf of the FMA’s “Parliament to Campus” there has been a sense of adventure. A new destination, sometimes, as with Georgia, in a country I have never visited. I take down the atlas; take out the encyclopaedia (still my preferred starting point rather than “google”) and look up the university

the town and the country. Google is very useful and quick access to background material, for example articles the political situation in the respective country, and its relations with the EU. Then there is the planning of the trip, the pleasure of travelling, the experience of a new location, getting a feel for the atmosphere of the city, the university, and the classrooms. Of course I still did and enjoyed the research for my zooms. But the only actual physical participation was turning on my laptop, clicking the link testing the sound levels and finding the best angle to set the screen. Et voilà, instead of watching the students assemble there they are suddenly, head and shoulders only.

And when the “zoom” seminar is over, there’s no socialising, general conversation and I’m back in my home and the students are back in Tbilisi or Toronto, perhaps marvelling and being thankful for new technology but somehow missing the atmosphere of human contact. The discovery of an anti-Covid vaccine, which is in itself an inspiring example of international research cooperation, has lifted all our spirit and I am looking forward to taking the atlas off the shelf again next year.



*Michael Hindley with the students of Ilia State University*

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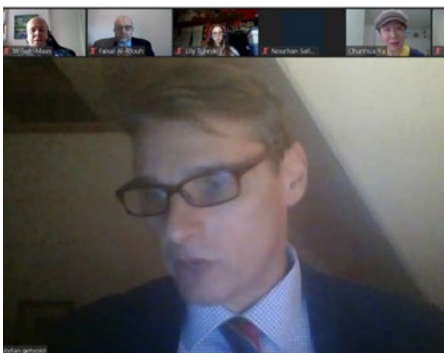


*Thanks to Candriam for supporting our EP to Campus Programme*



## THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY MUST BE CONSTANT

On 17 November 2020, I had the opportunity to give a lecture at York University in Toronto. The lecture was part of a series of seminars organised by the university's political science department. The university was founded on 26 March 1959 with a total of 76 students. In 2011, York University was Canada's third largest university, with more than 50 000 students enrolled. The series was held under the title of JMC (Jean Monnet Guest Speakers, Glendon College). Due to the pandemic, the lectures were given online. This format was indeed justified in view of the current situation, but it should be an exception as online debates are somewhat lacking in liveliness. Despite the unfortunate circumstances, the discussion unfolded well. Professor Willem Maas, the organiser of the series, opened the session by introducing the speaker. The professor had asked me during the preparatory phase to focus on my role as the director of a German political foundation which supports political education in different countries.



*Stefan Gehrold during his participation at the event of York University in Toronto.*

This led me to choose the aforementioned title. The format meant that I had 10 minutes for an introduction. I began by describing the tasks and challenges facing German political foundations, both in Germany and abroad. I also explained how these foundations are financed. I made no secret of the fact that the method of financing political foundations almost exclusively through public tax revenues is the subject of vigorous debate in Germany. Nevertheless, I stressed that I consider the existence of these foundations to be beneficial. I also outlined the history of these foundations in Germany. After the Second World War, political leaders were convinced that there was a need for political education in Germany. So the political foundations started out by providing political education in Germany. However, from the 1960s onwards their activities expanded abroad. Today about 60% of their resources are spent internationally. The budget of the largest political foundation amounts to more than EUR 210 million per year. This sum enables it to maintain more than 100 offices worldwide. Consequently, German political foundations operate these days more as development aid organisations in their areas of political education, and they are backed up by liaison offices. The remaining 40% is split between national political education departments, political analysis, scholarships and political archives.

During the debate, students asked me whether the fact that two of these political foundations refer to themselves as Christian restricts

them to working only with Christian organisations. I responded that this is not the case. They are active everywhere and they understand their role as being guided by the principles of Christianity. Indeed, both foundations today employ people of different religions, many even of no religion.

Another speaker raised the question of whether the establishment of the European Armed Forces would pose a risk to the global military balance. The European Armed Forces should indeed destabilise NATO and be seen as a competitor to the United States in the military field. While stressing that I am not an expert on security issues, I pointed out that the European Armed Forces are, in my view, a project that aims to give structure to and strengthen the national armed forces. This is a good idea in my view. I cannot see why these united European Armed Forces could not participate in NATO in the place of individual EU nations. Finally, one speaker made the argument that the establishment of united European Armed Forces could not be used as a tool to strengthen European integration. A thought which I find quite remarkable. The session lasted only one hour. I would like to thank Professor Willem Maas, the students and the speakers.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **“EU Financing for the Next Decade: Beyond the MFF and the Next Generation EU” by Brigid Laffan and Alfredo De Feo, published by European University Institute, 2020.**



In October 2019, the European University Institute, invited us to contribute to a stimulating workshop on the MFF 2021-2027, with a number of academics and other practitioners. At this moment, Ursula von der Leyen was already President of the Commission, waiting for the approval of the entire college. The proposals on MFF was on the table, the Parliament ready to open negotiations waiting for the Council to define its position. It is not exaggerate to say that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is one of the most important moments in the EU life, where the Member States and the EU Institutions decide the direction of Europe: the responses to the challenges and expectations. The negotiation on the MFF is one of the rare moments in EU life attracting the attention of national media. These negotiations have a quite consolidated pattern in which all the actors play their roles, sometimes with dramatic tones, but in which at the end there is a conclusion, one of the classic Euro-compromises where everyone is equally unhappy.

All seemed to follow this well known patterns when suddenly in March 2020, the situation changed. The Covid pandemic progressively invaded all the European countries. Although health was not one of the EU competences, voices were raised to have greater European coordination and, suddenly the Sleeping beauty (the Commission) awakened and in May 2020 a ‘revolutionary’ proposal was presented and even the European Council surprised everybody reaching unanimity on the Next Generation plan only a few weeks after the proposal. The present volume, which gathers contributions of the different authors, offers a global view of all the issues touched by the MFF and the Next Generation EU with the aim of highlighting the potentialities that it could develop. Our personal contribution is based on the experience we had the privilege to acquire during our years in the EP. Scholars, students and practitioners will find in this book ideas, suggestions and criticisms that go well beyond the current debate and will continue to be a source of inspiration for the future. The definitive agreement, reached by the European Council in December 2020, with the approval of the European Parliament, allow to start the next programming period with an European Union stronger and more resilient to face the challenges of the next decade. To conclude the disruptive crisis in 2020 triggered in three months

a triple breakthrough that the Parliament had not been able to wrest from the Council for two decades: unfreezing of the amount, issuing of a common European debt, decision to create genuine fresh own resources to repay that debt. But this unprecedented effort was meant to fund national policies, to the detriment of European ones. The big question mark is now: when the economic crisis is over, will the European institutions be willing and able to maintain such a financial arsenal and to re-orient it to the financing of Europeans policies through the MFF?

The book, edited by Brigid Laffan and Alfredo De Feo can be downloaded freely from the code QR below



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## “Elogio dell’Assemblea, tuttavia” by Andrea Manzella, published by Mucchi, 2021.



The word *tuttavia* (despite everything) which appears in the title of Andrea Manzella's 'parliamentary' pamphlet — a dense work of constitutional theory which is the fruit of many years' experience in the field, gained in the European Parliament, in the Italian Parliament and in the Council of Europe — harks back directly to the Italian Constituent Assembly. The word appeared on an agenda adopted in that pre-constitutional era: it was intended to draw attention to precisely those dangers inherent in the 'degeneration' of parliamentarianism which had fuelled the rise of fascism and ushered in 20 years of dictatorship. It thus represented a call for institutional measures to address, in particular, the problem of government instability. But almost 80 years later, alas, we can look back and say that that word *tuttavia* has too often been disregarded: the consequences have been particularly detrimental to the resilience of the Italian institutional and democratic system. Manzella's 'hymn of praise' to

parliaments therefore also sounds a warning - to all parliaments everywhere - and proposes innovative solutions on the solid and unimpeachable basis that is the role of the Assembly. In limpid prose, the author defines the Assembly's original function — which has stood the test of time — as a body fundamental to the political organisation of society. It is through the Assembly that separate individual energies are channelled. A force is created which takes on a life of its own: it reduces the level of violence in society, settles conflicts and prompts us to examine our consciences, thus forging a common identity. The Assembly is the soul of parliaments, gives expression to their dynamism and, through argument and public debate and decision-making, brings our fragmented society together once again. Manzella employs an evocative image to describe this centrality: 'the church in the village'. This reflection on the current political and parliamentary crisis cites liberally from constitutions and interpretations issued by constitutional courts. Distortions wrought by the realities of day-to-day politics are duly noted, but also assessed with an eye to the future: to the need to re-establish, on a new footing, the relationship between representativeness of society and political representation. For Manzella, it is inevitable that parliaments will have to come

to terms with the information society, which is now structured by the digital revolution, by rethinking their organisational arrangements, their procedures, their rules and very way in which the parliamentary mandate is to be exercised in a diffuse but connected parliament.

This slim but incisive work, written at the height of the pandemic as governments adopted legislative acts which 'seriously undermine democracy', is a clarion call to politicians to restore parliaments to their key central role, so that they can 'leave the old ways behind' and address the new challenges by innovating in harmony with the European Union. The task set is to breathe fresh life and force into our fragile democracy. It is precisely by drawing on the vitality of parliamentary assemblies that democracy can regain its regenerative power.

**Gerardo Bianco**  
EPP-ED, Italy (1994-1995)





# LATEST NEWS



European Parliament  
**FORMER MEMBERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**31 May 2021**

## MEMORIAL SERVICE

At 18.30 we will commemorate former MEPs who passed away in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

**1 June 2021**

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION "TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE"

The Secretariat will provide more information by email.

**1 June 2021**

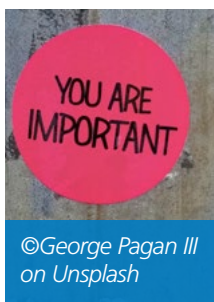
## DEBATE WITH ELISA FERREIRA, EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR COHESION AND REFORMS

FMA members and special guests will be invited to participate.

**2 June 2021**

## 20th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Starting at 10.00 a.m. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic FMA members will participate remotely. The Secretariat will provide more information by email.



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on Unsplash

On this special year of celebrations, we want to hear the voice of the FMA members, for that reason, we would like to receive short statements (30-50 words) or videos (1-2 minutes) to be published on our social media and website: **What does the Association mean to you?**

Send an email with your contribution to the Secretariat at :

FormerMembers@europarl.europa.eu

We look forward to hearing from you!

## FMA MEMBERS PUBLICATIONS



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On the new FMA website, you can find a [page dedicated to publications written by FMA members](#).

If you published a book and you would like to inform your colleagues and the public, please send an email to the FMA Secretariat with a picture of the cover of the book and a short description.

The text can be written in **English or French** and should count **100 words max**.

## IN MEMORIAM

## VALÉRY GISCARD D'ESTAING

In the person of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, France has lost a great statesman, and Europe has lost a great European. I would not be writing these lines were it not for his exemplary commitment to Europe and its institutions. It was in part thanks to him that from 7 to 10 June 1979, for the first time in the history of Europe, a European Parliament was directly elected by the peoples of the then European Community, which became the European Union. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was one of the founding fathers of the European Parliament. The development of a European democracy was a matter of great importance to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. He stood for election to the European Parliament after his term of office as President of France had ended. When I was elected to the European Parliament in 1979, I never imagined that we would become colleagues one day, first in the European Parliament and then in the Group of the European People's Party (EPP). When Leo Tindemans was elected Chair of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in January 1992, we cast our ballots one immediately after the other. When he became Chairman of the Convention which had been given

the task of drafting a European Constitution, it was a pleasure and privilege for me, as President of the EPP Group, to offer Valéry Giscard d'Estaing our group's unstinting support. Unfortunately, the Constitution was rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands, but we worked with Giscard to ensure that the substance of the Constitutional Treaty was preserved. The result was the Lisbon Treaty, which is now something similar to a constitutional basis for the European Union. Without Giscard d'Estaing, this would not have been possible.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was a friend of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. At Helmut Schmidt's funeral on 23 November 2015, at the Michaeliskirche in Hamburg, Giscard d'Estaing and I met by chance as we were leaving the church and I accompanied him outside, to where the military ceremony in honour of Helmut Schmidt was to take place. There we met the federal minister Peter Altmaier and Thomas de Maizière, whom I introduced to Giscard d'Estaing. Peter Altmaier said that he had been an alternate member of the Convention chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. And Thomas de Maizière's ancestors had

emigrated from France to establish a new Huguenot homeland in what was then Prussia.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was the driving force behind 'Re-Imagine Europa', a think tank set up a few years ago to reflect on the future of Europe and put forward proposals for the 'Conference on the Future of Europe'. I will be forever grateful to him for having asked me to take part in that initiative. This was what brought us together in recent years, sometimes in Berlin, at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and sometimes in Paris, at his home.

The many enriching conversations I had with him will always remain in my memory.

The unification of Europe consumed Giscard d'Estaing emotionally and intellectually. His faith in Europe is a legacy which will inspire others to continue his work. At the Conference on the Future of Europe which is about to start, we will maintain our commitment to the unification of Europe in memory of him. In so doing, we will be guided by this insight: we can only defend our European values — human dignity, freedom, democracy, justice and peace — in an uncertain world if the Europeans of the European Union are united, strong and determined. This is how we intend to carry Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's legacy forward.

**Hans-Gert Pöttering**

Former President of the European Parliament  
FMA President



President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing at a meeting with President Hans-Gert Pöttering in Paris (2017)

*\* This text is an adaptation of the letter sent by President Hans-Gert Pöttering to the son of Mr Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Louis Giscard d'Estaing.*

## THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VALÉRY GISCARD D'ESTAING

What set Valéry Giscard d'Estaing apart as a political leader was his staying power: 40 years after he left office, it is historians, and not journalists, who are now assessing his achievements. Voices from all countries and across the political spectrum have paid tribute to the former French President's contribution to European politics. It was his friendship and close understanding with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt that yielded the European Council, the election of Parliament by universal suffrage, and the European Monetary System, which paved the way for the single currency. That is already quite some legacy.

Yet much of what Mr Giscard d'Estaing did for Europe is often overlooked. You may not know it, but, once ousted from the Elysée, he led a second political life – one serving Europe. Firm in his belief that, from then on, it was Europe that would hold the reins on France's future, he decided to become an MEP, placing himself in the Community's engine room. As President of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, and later a member of the European People's Party, he gave his support to the very first democratic campaigns in Berlin – when the effects of the wall, although razed, were still keenly felt – Poland and Hungary. Again with Helmut Schmidt, he lobbied tirelessly for monetary union in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty, and remained unwavering in his commitment throughout the difficult ratification process and the painstaking preparations for its implementation.



*Alain Lamassoure and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing during the presentation of Re-Imagine Europa ©European Union 2018 - Source : EP*

But it was when chairing the 2002-2003 Convention on the Future of Europe that he really proved himself to be a great European, as he stepped into a role that was commensurate with his ambitions for Europe. While his style had its detractors as well as its admirers, no one could deny that he was the man for the job. In stewarding the ship, he held his course, yet showed flexibility at the helm by looking to counsel from those he deemed 'the young generation's finest experts on Europe'. In the final weeks, with governments deeply divided over the Iraq war, he forged a seemingly impossible alliance between MEPs and national politicians that led to the approval of the first real draft constitutional treaty: consensus was reached among over 200 delegates, representing governments and large political parties from all EU Member States and candidate countries. Alas, the glory was short-lived. The 'no' dealt to the constitutional treaty by the Dutch and French referenda delivered a painful personal setback on a par with his national defeat in 1981. And yet, as in 1981, he had


made a considerable impact. A few years later, 95% of the text that had made up the draft constitution was repackaged as the Lisbon Treaty. While important budgetary questions remained unanswered, the Treaty anchored the Union's powers, put the institutions on a more stable footing, and established a democratic political architecture that drew on the federal parliamentary model in all but name. So, although it underwent a name-change before coming into force, the spirit of the 'Giscard constitution' will continue to inspire the Union for years to come. A few weeks before his passing, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was still as driven as ever in his quest, overseeing the work of his new foundation – given the multilingual name 'Re-imagine Europa' – which aspires to invent the Europe of 2040. True greats never really die.

**Alain Lamassoure**  
EPP-ED, France (1989-2019)  
a.lamassoure@wanadoo.fr




## IN MEMORIAM



 11 November 2020  
**Marie-Claude VAYSSADE**  
 PES, France (1979-1994)


She served as a French Member of the European Parliament from 1979 until 1994. From 1989 to 1994, she was Vice-Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens' Rights. At the national level, Ms Vayssade represented the 'Parti socialiste'.



 29 November 2020  
**Remo SERNAGIOTTO**  
 EPP-ED & ECR, Italy (2014-2019)


He served as Italian Member of the European Parliament from 2014-2019. At the national level, he represented 'Forza Italia' (2014-2016) and 'Conservatori e Riformisti' (2016-2019).



 2 December 2020  
**Valéry GISCARD d'ESTAING**  
 ELDR & EPP, France (1989-1993)

He served as French Member of the European Parliament from 1989 until 1993. At the national level, he represented 'Union pour la démocratie française'.




 6 December 2020  
**Jaromír KOHLÍČEK**  
 GUE/NGL, Czech Republic (2004-2014 & 2016-2019)

He served as Czech Member of the European Parliament from 2004-2014 and 2016-2019. At the national level, he represented 'Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy'.


## IN MEMORIAM



 11 December 2020  
**Lydia SCHÉNARDI**  
 N, France (2004-2009)


She served as French Member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2009. At the national level, she represented "Front national".



 17 December 2020  
**Enrico FERRI**  
 SOC, NA, FE, UEN and EPP-ED, Italy (1989-2004)


He served as Italian Member of the European Parliament from 1989 until 2004. At the national level, he represented "Partito socialista democratico italiano", "Centro cristiano democratico", "Unione democratica per la Repubblica" and "Forza Italia".



 18 December 2020  
**Michał MARUSIK**  
 EFN & NA, Poland (2014-2019)

He served as Polish Member of the European Parliament from 2014 until 2019. At the national level, he represented "Kongres Nowej Prawicy".



 2 January 2021  
**Marco FORMENTINI**  
 NA & ELDR, Italy (1994-2004)

He served as Italian Member of the European Parliament from 1994 until 2004. At the national level, he represented "Lega Nord per l'indipendenza della Padania" (1994-2002) and "I Democratici" (2002-2004).



⚔ 6 January 2021

**Alfred LOMAS**

**SOC, United Kingdom (1979-1999)**

He served as British Member of the European Parliament from 1979 until 1999.  
At the national level, he represented the Labour Party (1979-1999).



⚔ 11 January 2021

**Konrad K. SCHWAIGER**

**EPP-ED, Germany (1994-2004)**

He served as German Member of the European Parliament from 1994 until 2004.  
At the national level, he represented "Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands" (1994-2004).



⚔ 13 January 2021

**Marielle DE SARNEZ**

**EPP& ALDE, France (1999-2017)**

She served as French Member of the European Parliament from 1999 until 2017.  
At the national level, she represented "Union pour la démocratie française" (1999-2008) and "Mouvement Démocrate" (2008-2017).



⚔ 23 January 2021

**Karl Erik OLSSON**

**ALDE, Sweden (1995-2004)**

He served as Swedish Member of the European Parliament from 1995-2004.  
At the national level, he represented "Centerpartiet".



## IN MEMORIAM



☹ 4 February 2021  
Paolo BARTOLOZZI  
EPP-ED, Italy (2001-2004 & 2008-2014)

He served as Italian Member of the European Parliament from 2001 to 2004 and from 2008 to 2014.

At the national level, he represented 'Il Popolo della Libertà' and 'Forza Italia'.



☹ 9 February 2021  
Franco MARINI  
EPP-ED, Italy (1999-2004)

He served as Italian Member of the European Parliament from 1999 until 2004.

At the national level, he represented 'Partito popolare italiano'.

## BECAUSE YOU HAVE LIVED

*"To laugh often and much; to win the respect of the intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the beauty in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that one life has breathed easier because you lived here. This is to have succeeded."*

BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON