



## The Association of Former Members after the Epidemic



## Editorial by the AFM President

The days go by and uncertainty remains about our future as the information provided and the measures taken by different countries are disparate, diverse and even contradictory.

This demonstrates a lack of effective coordination and of a stronger commitment to solidarity.

Solidarity may finally have been taken into account but without enthusiasm; it is too late, too grudging and too conditional, severely damaging the EU's image.

Not to mention the serious and threatening decision made by the Karlsruhe court of justice, which, although it has no legal value for the EU, is nevertheless very worrying. Trump, Putin and China in particular must be delighted.

It has also highlighted the flaws in the way our institutions works, which are not new. The slow erosion of the structure and foundation of the EU is mainly due to an insidious reversal of its rules, making the Council the dominant decision-making body. In other words, the system of nation states is at the controls, which has let us see the limits and bad practices, to say the least.

After the crisis, we will not be able to avoid an in-depth review of the EU's working methods, chosen direction and priorities.

There is no doubt that we will be affected, that the place and role of civil society organisations will be discussed, even called into question, if recent events are anything to go by.

Moreover, there seems to be a poisonous and pernicious atmosphere surrounding the EESC, so the EP's refusal to validate the 2018 budget, on the advice of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), will not be without consequences.

OLAF's intervention and the EP's decision clearly put the EESC at risk. This is not a question of challenging the facts (not within our remit) but of expressing concern that this matter will serve as a pretext for weakening the EESC.

This would not be a new development; the Committee has always had to fight for recognition, for its very existence. In the most notable incident relating to the convention on the draft constitution, we had a very broad coalition against us, but we were able to gain crucial support. What is it like now?

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**Biannual review may contain  
certain anachronisms.**

I am concerned because civil society organisations are still called into question and restricted in some countries. I told the EESC president, Luca Jahier, about this some months ago and made some suggestions for how we could become stronger. He was very receptive.

This major crisis, which has been unexpected, exceptionally severe and of unprecedented magnitude, can also be life-saving by highlighting the urgent need for Europe to have a greater presence and the ability to quickly and effectively respond to the various situations we are facing now and will face in the future.

One thing is certain: in order to prepare to deal with other such catastrophes, and preserve and consolidate our social achievements, culture and understanding of democracy, we will need Europe to be united, strong and respected, and able to make its voice heard on the international stage.

Editorial – addendum (24/05/2020)

I have just read (on 19 May) the recovery plan launched by France and Germany. It is encouraging and is «life-saving», as we had hoped.

This initiative is a step in the right direction; it is breaking down barriers and thereby paving the way for more solidarity and a stronger European commitment.

Its unifying nature is in contrast to the prevailing populism and to nationalists of all persuasions, and will undoubtedly provoke reactions.

It will also force the Member States to clarify their European commitment and, in some cases, show their true nature.

However, its success still depends on the decisions of the other Member States, as required by the nation state system.

The initiative should give the Commission the courage to take back the role of head of operations (which is its by right) that the Council has deprived it of for too long, the effects of which can now be seen.

This is a fantastic opportunity for the initiative to come to fruition due to the upcoming German Presidency of the EU, in July, which we hope will be fruitful, effective and decisive.



In any case, after the crisis, as well as the foreseeable serious consequences for the public, who will need specific responses, we will not be able to avoid an in-depth analysis of how our institutions work, and will need to clarify the objectives and redefine and adapt the EU's structures to make it a success.

We will need to relaunch the discussions on the various assumptions about the EU's chosen direction, organisations and interventions, particularly the EU's concentric circle proposal, which is pejoratively called «two-speed Europe» by those who are blocking the opportunity to progress towards more integrated policies.

This approach, initiated and then withdrawn without explanation by former Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, remains a mystery.

This is a major issue that we need to clarify, demystify and implement if we want to preserve and further our achievements and have a presence internationally and geostrategically.

From this point of view, it is curious to observe the attitudes of certain States, which are ignoring their commitments and duties with regard to the EU with complete impunity.



More seriously, a «16+1 coalition» comprising 15 Eastern European countries (including 10 EU Member States) and China, whose secretariat is in Beijing and whose headquarters are in Warsaw, is being allowed to form without any reactions worthy of the name.

This coalition already has the ability to interfere in EU decisions, and this intrusion could become more pronounced if three other members were to join and, if this were to happen, they would have the means to influence the EU's policies. (Three countries are apparently candidates.)

And then of course there is the Višegrad Group, which comprises Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia.

So many situations that need to be clarified. The question is simple: who is putting the EU in a difficult position, those who are trying to revitalise it or those who are engaging in politics separately? Inside and outside at the same time.

Indeed, the crisis has brought to light the inconsistencies. If we want, it can also be life-saving.

To conclude, I cannot resist paraphrasing the famous French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine and his fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (*La cigale et la fourmi*). Today, the ant realised that by refusing to help the grasshopper, it condemned itself to suffer the same fate.

Finally, with regard to our association, we can be glad that none of our members have been victims and that, despite the difficulties, we have been able to have discussions, which is encouraging and pleases me.

It should also be stressed that, despite the difficulties, the association's Bureau continues to monitor the developing situation and take decisions accordingly.

All of the problems raised, particularly in terms of the resumption of our activities, are important but depend on what the EESC can offer us.

With regard to projects that we need to deal with as a matter of priority, I do not believe that there are any insurmountable barriers; we simply need to reach an agreement for them to be implemented.

However, I do have some comments:

- Analysing discussions between Bureau members during this difficult period should enable us to improve our way of working.
- The impatience we are expressing (which emphasises our dedication) gives the impression that we are not taking into account the major obstacles that the EESC is facing in terms of its way of working and the predictable consequences of this for our association.

Of course, you will receive regular updates on the situation.

These are just some thoughts I wanted to share with you, friends. Your ideas, thoughts and criticisms on both the content and our management of the crisis will add to the debate.

While we wait for the situation to improve and hope to have the pleasure of seeing each other soon, I suggest that we continue and intensify our discussions on the future of the EU, based on your commitments, knowledge and sensitivities.

Kind regards,

**Roger Briesch**, *President of the AFM*



# News from the Association of Former Members



# 2020 questionnaire for AFM members

## Preamble:

The AFM is a forum where former EESC members can contact each other and receive information. It arranges (within budgetary limits) an annual general meeting, provides the opportunity to go on an annual trip and attend an annual EESC event, distributes two issues of the «Connect» newsletter every year and regularly shares topical EESC information. The AFM's activities are run by the president and a five-person bureau, and rely heavily on economic support from the EESC, which also provides secretarial assistance, meeting premises and interpretation. The AFM has approximately 200 members.

*In 2018, the AFM conducted a survey among its members on their activities and accessibility. We are very grateful to Evelyne Pichenot for her excellent handling of the survey. The responses were very useful for the AFM Bureau in its talks with the EESC about cooperation between the AFM and the EESC, sparking discussions about the AFM's role and potential.*

**The AFM Bureau invites its members to briefly express their suggestions and expectations as regards the AFM, and its role and activities.**

Please respond to the attached «2020 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR AFM MEMBERS» and send it asap to Maria Cossu: [Formermembers@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:Formermembers@eesc.europa.eu).

Name:

Mandate date:

## 1. THE AFM AS A FORUM FOR CONTACT AND INFORMATION

**Should the AFM's role as a forum for contact and information continue to be the same as it has been until now?**

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

If your answer is «no»:

What changes do you suggest as regards AFM contact and information activities (for instance, in relation to the «Connect» newsletter, events, networking etc.)?

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## 2. THE AFM AS A FORUM FOR ASSISTING EESC CONSULTATIONS

**Should the AFM and its members also strive to assist the EESC with its consultative work, as requested?**

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

If your answer is «yes»:

How should the AFM and its individual members offer to assist the EESC?

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### 3. OTHER KINDS OF AFM ACTIVITIES

Should the AFM create other kinds of activities?

☐ yes

☐ no

☐ don't know

If your answer is «yes»:

What kinds of activities would you suggest be created?

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### 4. WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED IN AFM ACTIVITIES?

☐ yes

☐ no

If your answer is «yes»:

What kinds of activities would you mainly prefer to be involved in?

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### 5. COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS REGARDING YOUR MEMBERSHIP OF THE AFM

What further comments/suggestions do you have regarding your membership of the AFM and/or the AFM more generally?

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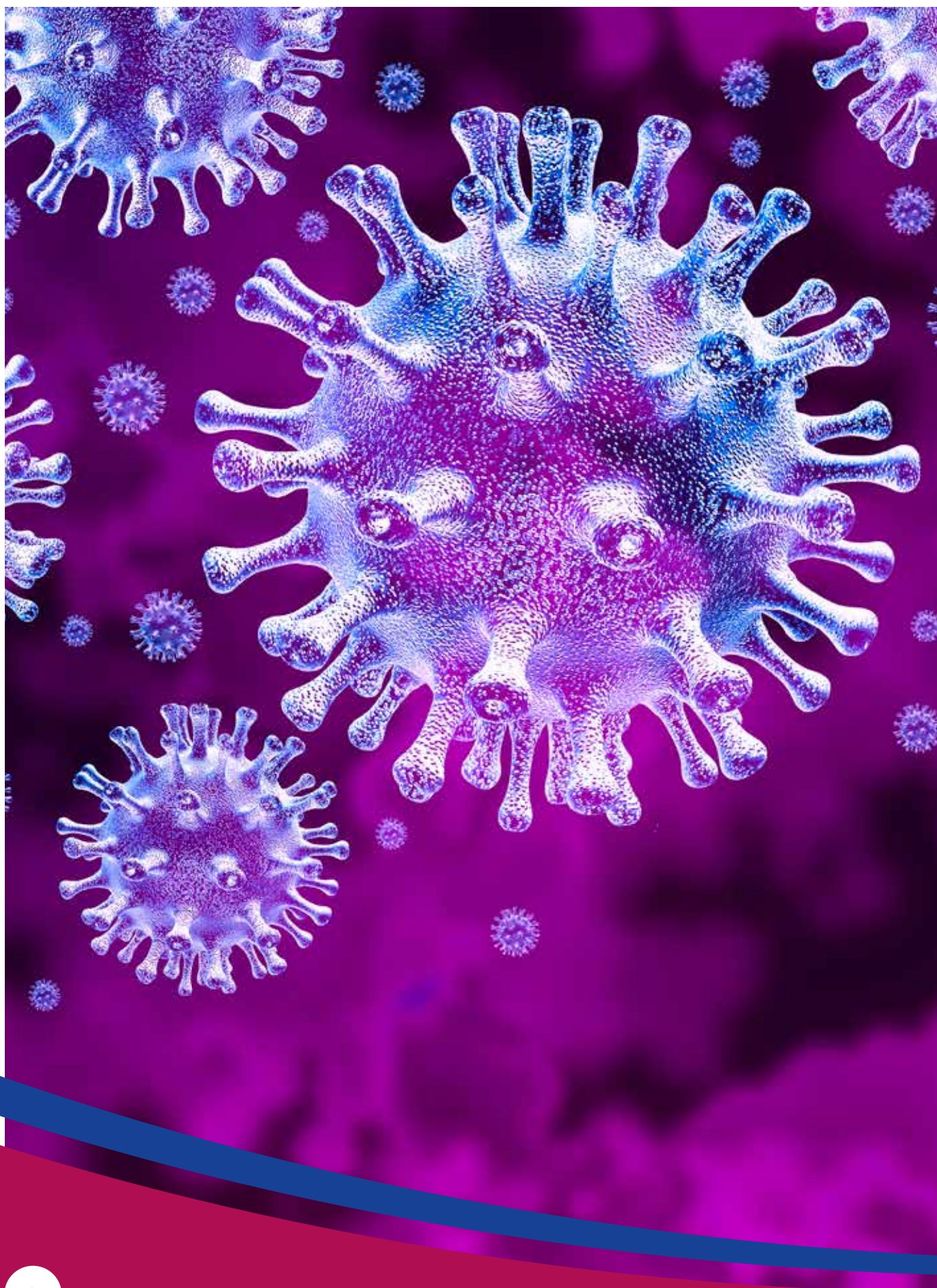
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**Thank you!**



# COVID





# COVID-19 - what next?



The health crisis is not yet over. It is too soon to take stock of the situation, analyse what went wrong and see what could be improved. Nevertheless, I would like to share a few thoughts.

1/ European integration has yet to be achieved: I am one of those who have always preferred to talk about European integration rather

than European Union. This is because the EU's external borders are not definitively established, because its currency is not in use in all the Member States, because it has no defence or tax system and no real common diplomacy, and because it is only an observer in international institutions such as the UN or the WHO, which is a key player in a pandemic.

As if there were any doubt, the coronavirus crisis has shown how far we still are from the United States of Europe which, along with others, I hope to see one day. Not just because the EU's remit in the area of health is small, but mostly because the feeling of being an EU citizen is crumbling at the first hard knock.

I was struck not only by the lack of coordination (border closures, lockdown with no synchronisation, masks, tests etc.) but, above all, to see how, during this crisis, everyone, including the citizens, became stuck in a national mindset without looking at what their neighbours were doing. And they were blaming their respective governments for problems that an interested observer capable of reading the foreign press would see were not peculiar to their country: the shortage of masks, the treatment reserved for the elderly in institutions, the lack of recognition given to nursing auxiliaries, the closure of schools, the increase in the number of people needing food aid and the risks of lockdown for the economy ... it was easy to see that the questions and anger were spreading across all the countries in the same way. This did not prevent people from blaming THEIR government for these dysfunctions, mistakes or lack of foresight.

However, it is not just the citizens who were acting this way: leaders did not seem to have consulted each other, or discussed the matter much, or even looked at what the others were doing, the problems they had encountered, the solutions found, as if each one's immediate reaction to the emergency was to turn inwards. We have certainly seen diversity, but hardly any sign of unity. At all levels, in every country, there seems to be very

little feeling of belonging to the European Union, but rather powerful national reflexes and no apparent need to cooperate. Even though the crisis also showed us that we could work remotely!

2/ The European social model: strangely, while there is little feeling of belonging, the European social model, for its part, has shown its strength. Never has the situation seemed so coherent across the EU compared to other parts of the world: the European Union's social model has made it possible for people to be treated everywhere without paying huge sums of money, while it costs between USD°100 and USD 900 to be treated in the US with insurance, and without insurance about USD°1 600 (EUR°1 475). In Europe, employees, companies and the self-employed have received assistance - not enough to prevent the long queues of people needing food aid, of course - but more than everywhere else. The crisis has not led, as in the United States, to immediate mass redundancies, or to poverty for all workers in the informal economy as in Africa, India or Latin America.

The economic crisis is ahead of us, and it will hit Europe along with the rest of the world. In the European Union, however, the unemployed will receive benefits and be offered training ... and patients will continue to be treated without running into debt.

Pursuing European integration after the crisis will mean demonstrating the strength of the European social model, and the European Economic and Social Committee is best placed to do this. It is also the time for the EESC to make sure its proposals take centre stage. The most relevant, urgent thing is to introduce a European minimum income [For a European Framework Directive on a Minimum Income, own-initiative opinion, rapporteur: Georges Dassis (SOC/584), adopted in February 2019, and European minimum income and poverty indicators, own-initiative opinion, rapporteur: Georges Dassis (SOC/482), adopted in December 2013].

To be continued ...

**Béatrice OUIN** (AFM member)

# Society afflicted by the pandemic



I would like to start by sending my deepest condolences to those who have lost a loved one during this pandemic caused by COVID-19, an invisible enemy. We have all lost thousands of our fellow Europeans from all countries of the EU; we are all affected and full of sadness and sympathy for these tragic losses.

Yes, all the countries of the European Union are dealing with this particular situation, and their governments have adopted or are adopting measures to protect people's health and to help businesses, employees and other economic players who have found themselves in difficulties overnight as a result of the pandemic. The measures chosen vary according to political decisions, and their effectiveness will be assessed at a later stage, as it is still too soon to judge who has reacted better than others.

In any case, the Czech Republic is one of the countries reporting fewer cases of illness and fewer deaths per number of inhabitants. It is still unclear which factors have helped to ward off huge-scale contagion in my country. As the studies and analyses are currently underway, we can only speculate as to whether our success is due to the swift reaction of the government, which some see as overkill or panic. Or whether it is thanks to the discipline with which people have respected - and are continuing to respect - the measures adopted: for example, strictly observing the lockdown rules, immediately donning makeshift, homemade protective masks as they dusted off sewing machines and summoned skills they acquired before 1989. Or the good care provided by the health services and the competence of epidemiologists. Some believe it is due to the tradition of large-scale vaccination which has been in place for decades. What role was played by the special measures introduced for the very elderly, of whom there are fewer in the Czech Republic than in most EU countries because of our shorter life expectancy? And so on and so forth.

For me, this unprecedented time in a state of emergency is a "test of solidarity". With regard to the state's handling of the crisis and the political decisions taken at different levels, it is the ultimate test of confidence.

Personally speaking, I am very privileged. Being retired, I have been accustomed to a flexible working rhythm for several years already. The measures introduced were therefore not so radical for me, especially as I have my house and my garden where I can get some fresh air and keep myself busy in a pleasant environment. On the other hand, this lockdown will become unbearable if it extends beyond the short term.

I am thinking of those who are not so fortunate, and are isolated or have even been abandoned.

I am thinking of the parents of school children who have been cooped up inside together for several weeks, often in very small flats where it is impossible to strike a work-life balance and reconcile working at home with their home lives. More specifically, I am thinking of the women who were forced to take on new roles — or whose roles became more demanding according to how their lives were organised.

I am thinking of those working at home. It appears that it was - and still is - not at all abnormal to be sitting at a computer for 11 to 12 hours a day. From this I deduce that, on the one hand, this period has served to teach people how to use digital tools in everyday life, but, on the other hand, that the majority of those who worked at home were «exploited».

I am thinking of those who work without respite to care for and treat the sick and bring relief - in other words, to provide all the services necessary to preserve the health of those in need; I am also thinking of those working round the clock in public services, whose role has become absolutely vital.

In my opinion, this experience of the pandemic is a testament to the irreplaceable role of public authorities, who alone can and must safeguard standards of living and strategies for rebuilding society for the future: the welfare state, the rule of law, the state of solidarity, and so on. It is time to break down not just physical barriers, but also those which continue to exist in our minds.

**Dana ŠTECHOVÁ** (AFM member)

## A new era, a new global balance

# EUROPE'S DUAL RESPONSIBILITY



*The following is an excerpt from a longer analysis by Mr Koryfidis of the present and future situation in Europe and the world.*

Europe has a dual responsibility today. It is responsible for its own survival as a political, economic and cultural bloc, and it is responsible for creating a new, sustainable balance in the era of humankind that will be born from our experience of the last one hundred days.

We know that Europe is responsible for its own survival. We have discussed and set out what that entails since the time of the project to adopt a constitution. What was missing then was ambition, and the ambition can and must now be reviewed, at least on two priority levels.

The first concerns the pace and speed of the EU's political workings. A way must be found of coordinating the timescales of our decision-making with those of the other major global powers, in particular the United States.

The second level is the lack of coherence, the confusion created during the initial phases of managing the virus. Put simply, what became evident during the difficult initial stages of the Covid-19 outbreak in Europe was that there was no Europe. This was the worst thing that could have happened to us just when the Union's renewed institutions were finding their place.

If that picture does not change during the current phase of recovery from the damage of the last one hundred days, fragmentation will ensue. A uniform and balanced recovery policy is therefore urgently needed. A policy that will be clearly accepted by all parties, including by those paying for it.

Given the above, Europe's relaunch in the post-Covid era could be its salvation, delivery from the burdens borne by all of us in this important, unprecedented and far-reaching attempt to marshal and develop our bloc. The most significant of these burdens are the regrets of the past and our misconception that in our multicultural bloc international solidarity is an anti-national practice.

Europe's other key responsibility today concerns its role in shaping the new global configurations in the era dawning post Covid-19.

I will summarise that role, leaving aside the aspects that I believe require particularly considered and confidential treatment.

To begin with, I think that Europe possesses an asset enjoyed by no other bloc anywhere else on the planet. That asset is its experience of negotiation as a way of resolving differences and problems.

This long experience of negotiation – from the time of Ancient Greece to the Europe of the European Union – has given Europeans a feeling for dialogue and compromise.

It is precisely what is needed in the new age of humankind. It is an approach that will yield solutions to the problems we are all going to face in the future.

Thus alongside the effort to address its own problems of survival in the new era, Europe has a second responsibility that may be even more important. That is the responsibility to take the initiative, within and maybe outside of international organisations, in seeking a rebalancing of global relations. A rebalancing of the prospects for humanity, for the resilience of the planet, and for quality of life and therefore work.

These are the most advanced weapons humanity has at its disposal today. They are the assets humanity needs now.

**Christoforos KORYFIDIS** (AFM member)



## Facing the unknown



Self-isolating at home does have some benefits. One of these is the opportunity to look ahead. The British historian Peter Hennessy has said that in the future we will divide this century into BC and AC – before corona and after corona. Right now, we are living in DC – during corona – and we are all trying to adjust

in different ways. One of the problems is that so much is uncertain, but there are some things we definitely know.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is the biggest threat to global public health for 100 years. It requires both sophisticated and draconian measures from the state to control it. In addition to the often tragic personal impacts, it has already imposed huge financial burdens on individuals, business and governments. The mounting debt and economic impact won't disappear, and it has created an atmosphere of concern and insecurity unequalled since 1939. All these things we know, but there are many things we don't know that add to the uncertainty.

We don't know how long it will remain a threat and there is, as yet, no formula for restarting a crippled global economy. No country has yet developed a proven exit strategy from lockdown and continual recurrence remains a strong possibility. In addition, the impact on the Global South has yet to be felt but could be massive and the world's geo-political frameworks are in a state of flux.

Coronavirus is shocking, both because we chose to ignore its predictability and because of its devastating impact. It has potentially rewritten the rules – it has certainly made us ask what rules are the most important. We can try to use the tools of state intervention, massive financial support and progressive consumer stimulus to restart the global economy, but is this the time to question «business as usual»? We have an opportunity to radically rethink our «growth» model, which, with its unthinking globalism, lack of concern for the environment and disregard of personal well-being, has been partly responsible for where we are today.

Can the EESC take a clear stand on behalf of civil society and say we are looking for a new post-coronavirus world in which well-being, sustainability and equity are not only the guiding principles but are also embedded in every aspect of the recovery plans? Let's hope so!

**Richard ADAMS** (AFM member)

## CORONAVIRUS: A master class for Europe



I am Portuguese. I very much love my country and its people, both those who live here and those living in the Portuguese diaspora around the world.

I love and particularly appreciate Portugal's culture and tradition of hospitality and solidarity, especially at historic moments of poverty and collective distress.

I love the rich history of this

uncomplaining people who, without giving in to resignation, knows how to lend a helping hand at times of adversity.

This is a people collectively determined to face the unknown in that great adventure for meeting new peoples, beliefs and cultures – that which was the Portuguese Discoveries.

The Portuguese are a peaceable, cheerful people who, managing to contain their anger, survived two dictatorships – albeit moderate ones – freeing itself from both, and regaining democracy in 1640 and in April 1974, in revolutions without fatalities: revolutions with flowers on the tips of swords and in the barrels of guns.

Having visited most countries in the world, I am most happy to be Portuguese and share with my fellow countrymen and women the victories and the joy, and also the sadness and the suffering that life throws our way.

But I am neither a fundamentalist nor a chauvinist, nor am I a nationalist, focused only on myself and my homeland. I feel that I am a Portuguese citizen, but no less a European citizen or citizen of the universe.

It is therefore as a European citizen who for several years served European ideals and values at the highest levels in our Union that I would like to share with my brothers and sisters, and fellow citizens of Europe and the world, some of the feelings which we have been able - or unable - to draw upon to together face this war against an «invisible, but common enemy»: the coronavirus.

This is a war that knows no borders or regimes. It needs to be tackled by everyone, with the same weapons and the same awareness of universal solidarity that it requires.

Throughout my life at the service of the ideals and institutions of the social economy and solidarity, both at national and international level, I have learned and have taught that, since we are all brothers and sisters and jointly responsible for the common good, we should all show solidarity as the primary value of both human life in society and corresponding policies.

Therefore, without deeming my country, which I love so much, as I do Europe and the world, to be any better or worse than the others or alone or any further ahead in this fight, I would like to highlight two examples of civic and solidarity-oriented behaviour that the Portuguese have adopted to face this scourge that Europe, historically the *mater et magistra* («mother and teacher») of human rights, democracy, the right to asylum and humane welcome, could do with learning again at this school, which the coronavirus has sent us back to.

I shall mention only these two:

*Firstly:* Portugal was one of the first countries to decree, and its people one of the first to spontaneously buy in to, collective preventive measures: the government, in exemplary sync with the President of the Republic and the Parliament, as well as with civil and religious authorities, immediately took the initiative to carry out the general and automatic regularisation of all immigrants so as to facilitate free access for them to social and health services and other public services.

I consider this a most positive and timely measure for a country which, as a country of emigrants, is also considered world-wide as a model for immigrant integration policies and practice.

In keeping, therefore, with its history of welcoming people, and as an effective response to the lessons to be learned from the fight against this and all other pandemics, Europe must swiftly, and in a coordinated and solidarity-based manner, step up its humanist policies and practices in the face of the challenges of increasing immigration, in order to make best use of everything positive that it brings and to prevent it from posing a risk, particularly in terms of the health and safety of individuals and families.

*Secondly:* Moving beyond the shortcomings and traditions of fierce opposition between parties, the government asked for the cooperation and joint commitment of all parties to deal with the invasion of this «enemy».

For their part, the parties, in particular the biggest and main party of the opposition, responded immediately, the latter's leader announcing in Parliament and stating in writing to its members that «the time for cooperation has come» and that «a sense of the greater good for the country is needed», since «it is neither patriotic nor ethically sound to take advantage, in party political terms, of political weakness in the context of the pandemic».

This is the kind of act that Europe needs. Particularly at times such as these. In common causes, the noble art of politics should prevail over the «art» of politicking.

The urgent need for solidarity driven by values rather than interests, in health and disease, in the economy and finance, and in policies of general and common interest, is in fact the key lesson we can take from the coronavirus master class.

This is what WE – those of us who were appointed to the highest European bodies, such as our EESC, to create bridges and promote solutions for the creation of a genuine «people's Europe», rather than merely a Europe of States – are being called upon to put into practice and teach, through our words and our deeds.

Although nominated by governments, at the suggestion of parties, trade unions and other institutions, WE have all have been selected to create a Europe for Europeans and not to represent or defend the interests of our respective countries, parties, beliefs or affiliations.

Let this commendable behaviour by the opposition, irrespective of the countries in which it occurs, be taken up not only within each country, but throughout the whole of this, our «shared home» that is Europe, as an expression of great solidarity – of which the «founding fathers» dreamed – between Europeans, as «free and equal» people, «living in harmony with one another».

This is the major lesson that the coronavirus teaches us: Europe and the world - we either show solidarity, or we are nothing!

Unqualified solidarity between equals and in all domains: that is the lesson this master class teaches us.

**Victor MELÍCIAS** (AFM member)

# SOCENOMICS

## A novel approach to Economics in a post-coronavirus world

Influential thinkers the world over are applying their collective wisdom to analysing ways in which conventional economic thinking will change in a post-coronavirus era. Writing in the Financial Times, economist Wendy Carlin says we need a «new way to talk about the economy». But we need much more than an alternative economic narrative. We need a radical review of the make-up of economic policy and a fundamental reset of the teaching and application of basic economic theory.

The coronavirus crisis has shaken the world to its core. In the fall-out, it is increasingly clear that a change to conventional economic thinking will be vital in a world unlikely ever to return to where it once was. The most important focus of the learning process is the urgent need to strike a better balance between the health and wellbeing of humanity, the sustainability of the planet and the need for economic growth. This requires a new culture which regards health as a nation's wealth, its natural resources as its riches and its people as its priority - a new approach as novel as the virus itself. **SOCENOMICS** could do just that.

By replacing «economics» with a concept which links social, environmental and economic policy together and places a sustainable, socially just society alongside job creation and growth in one all-inclusive new theory, **SOCENOMICS** could revolutionise our outdated approach to economic principles and offer a simple, yet comprehensive, solution to the most serious challenge yet to 21st century society.

Economics alone cannot make the world go round. As COVID-19 has proved, our economy is intrinsically linked with the health and wellbeing of society and the protection of the environment. The application of the theory of **SOCENOMICS** would ensure that all three are essential points on an equilateral triangle. But our education, experience and areas of expertise are divided into silos which make us think about life in society, in politics, in business, in the home or outdoors as if they were in separate, watertight compartments. This leads to imbalance and inequity in the sharing of resources, roles and responsibilities between people, depending on age, ability, aspiration, gender, colour or creed, as well as between, and within, nations worldwide.



While the coronavirus crisis is a product of global interconnection, it exposes these physical, social and cultural divisions and throws into chaos our approach to social, environmental and economic modelling. COVID-19 has placed the lives and livelihoods of many millions in jeopardy. With war-like imagery, the «front line» is every hospital and care home in every country, where doctors, nurses and others risk their lives daily to care for the sick. The victims are generally the oldest, poorest and most vulnerable in society. Our experience may differ depending on whether we have a pension, a certain postcode or a bank account, but we all have a common «enemy». It is one we will overcome but, in doing so, radical change will be needed to the way we organise ourselves and operate in our world.



That change must be managed. It must be as overarching as it is targeted and as compassionate as it is aggressive. By adopting a new, joined-up local, regional, national and global approach, it should involve every sector of society and every aspect of our life. If the coronavirus experience has taught us anything, it serves as an urgent and vital warning that it is only through the healthy interconnection of all our social, environmental and economic activities across the globe that we can change the world for the better.

By replacing the conventional teaching of economics, **SOCENOMICS** will also offer a new perspective on our values to give a better understanding of the irrevocable link between the impact of all social, physical, biological and psychological activities on our lives and a greater appreciation of health over wealth. In other words, the new «norm» should be to strive for healthier people and a healthier planet rather than a wealthier economy.

To achieve this, the long-standing use of economic growth, or GDP, as a measure of national success should be replaced by new «beyond GDP» systems such as those proposed by the OECD and adopted by countries such as New Zealand or Bhutan, which count the cost of human wellbeing as the mark of a healthy economy. In this way, we not only heed the warning, but learn the main lesson of COVID-19: that society has to address a common challenge and only by positive action together will we be able to rise above it.

In simple terms, the definition of «economic success» would be more meaningful if it goes beyond pennies in pockets, the bank balance or investment in stocks. It should include medics per habitant, literacy levels, food security and disease control as well as levels of air and water quality as a measurement of the health of the planet. The importance of global solidarity should also figure, as should the value of roles requiring empathy, caring, compassion and kindness. While difficult to measure, statistics, such as life expectancy, suicide rates, unemployment, sick-leave and community cohesion, could be included in the calculation which sets the bar beyond GDP at a level excluding none.

In this way, **SOCENOMICS** would help develop greater emotional intelligence which goes far beyond the intellectual requirements set by traditional testing in academic institutions. It would place greater value on those working in caring, cleaning, construction or other roles which have tended, until now, to be considered of less value. The nurse who stands at the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus, the teacher who returns to work to look after the children of key workers or vulnerable children in spite of the school shutdown, the migrant who picks fruit for a pittance: these people are among many who rarely receive recognition for their service. These, and many other taxpayers, bailed out the banks after the financial crash of 2008. Is this not the time for banks to return the favour?

By forging an equal link between the social, environmental and economic impact of all policies on people and the planet, **SOCENOMICS** makes it legitimate to challenge those policies that place greater importance on economic growth without taking proper account of the cost to humanity. Politicians have been guided by science in their reaction to the coronavirus. The earth has been granted a breathing space and humanity has been given a wake-up call which places a new, more urgent, perspective on the value of healthcare, the importance of community, the threat of climate change and the need for openness and transparency. In this way, priorities will be reset to create a new way of thinking which values health over wealth, conservation over consumption and community over cost.

**Jane MORRICE** (AFM member)

# Covid-19

## Article on the covid-19 pandemic in the UK



On 23 March 2020 the UK government imposed self-isolation on all over 70s and near total lockdown on everyone else, except key workers, e.g. health workers and emergency services. People under 70 could only leave home for work, food, medicine or exercise once a day.

The UK population is 67 million, the second largest in Europe. 250 000 people tested positive for COVID-19 and 36 000 have died. 980 people died on one day in early April, but numbers are now falling fast. Yesterday 350 people died of COVID-19 in hospital, care homes or at home.

So the government has now relaxed the lockdown, so that healthy over 70s and under 70s can leave home for work, food, medicine and regular exercise in public spaces, but must maintain a two metre social distance and can only meet one person outdoors apart from the family they live with. No home visits are permitted. All restaurants, cafes and pubs remain closed until July, but some are organising food takeaway and delivery services. Public transport is limited and a 14-day quarantine for all arrivals at UK airports will be introduced on 8 June 2020, disrupting overseas summer holiday plans and tourism.

British schools have stayed open throughout the lockdown for the children of key workers and vulnerable children, but on 1 June schools will open for Year 1 (5-year olds) and Year 6 (10/11-year olds). This is opposed by militant trade unions, and many parents are nervous about returning children to school, because the government message about staying home to stay safe and well has been so effective. They have been frightened by films of Italian doctors struggling to deal with this dreadful disease and patients fighting for breath.

The government is spending huge sums of money to support workers, paying 80% of wages to «furloughed» staff to prevent widespread unemployment. Now it wants to rebuild the economy by encouraging people back to work in construction, factories, DIY and garden centres, but some people are now suffering from Coronaphobia, reluctant to return to work, cushioned by government grants, and have enjoyed staying at home with their family,

Scientists are developing a vaccine and antibody tests and there is a trial track and trace project on the Isle of Wight to control the virus spread. I am one of 3.6 million people who self-report daily to an NHS COVID-19 App online which tracks the virus across England and has identified hot spots, including London, which has had the largest number of cases.

I live in a retirement village and self-isolated for eight weeks, which was hard. My daughters live a long way away and are both key workers. One is a children's social worker and the other a legal manager in a London council providing litigation services to six councils. My son-in-law works for another London council, organising food deliveries for vulnerable families. When I finally left home to collect medicine and fuel last week, I was like a bird let out of its cage!

I hope that my AFM colleagues across Europe are also coping well with this pandemic.

**Lynne FAULKNER** *(AFM member)*

## A Personal View



We live in strange times as our Government's struggle to make good decisions about protecting us from Covid-19 but feeling desperate as the world's economies crumble with the prospect of loss of industries and the consequent loss of jobs for thousands of people. A huge uncertainty surrounds us as we individually struggle with whether we feel safe to go back to work and anxious that we don't

want to be infected or to infect others.

Lockdown has been experienced by people in many ways. For some it has provided an opportunity to take stock and slow down and the ability to enjoy house and garden and that daily exercise. For others it has produced the stress of looking after small children and trying to balance working at home with home schooling with little access to the outdoors. Not easy. People with disabilities have had their usual supports and contacts reduced as carers have been redeployed and those looking after people with dementia struggle to maintain their lives with no respite or support.

Our communities seem to have adapted and accepted the need for these measures. We calmly queue at the supermarket, remain tolerant of the gaps on some shelves and manage to keep our distance. However, what has emerged is an even bigger awareness of the inequalities in our society in relation to health, education, and income. Our most deprived areas have suffered more from the pandemic in terms of deaths and infection. The existing health inequalities have been exacerbated. The incomes of those in many areas of deprivation are based on the gig economy, zero-hour contracts and minimum wages. I hope this situation will be a signal for change.

The children in low income families have less opportunity to benefit from technology solutions to continuing their schooling if they have no access to a PC or tablet or must compete with parents for their use. Getting back to school is going to be critically important but the management of the return is tricky with physical distancing.

Our National Health Service has done a wonderful job in caring for those who are sick and those who have died. The death rate has been appalling and a tragedy for all the families. Our care homes have been badly hit and their role has sadly, only recently, been properly acknowledged. Caring for our older people and those with disabilities is a precious job and done with great kindness and skill. In the future this sector must be recognised and appreciated to a much greater extent. We must support all our staff through this traumatic time for them.

Do I feel gloomy? Yes, I do at the moment as I see our accepted way of life fragmented as people continue to die and people who are bereaved are alone. I feel for those who are living very isolated and stressful existences and don't see a future. However, what have we seen emerging from this crisis. A stronger community solidarity: a greater appreciation of those who care for us, transport us; serve us in shops; deliver food – a great coming together of people willing to give of themselves, now acknowledged in our Thursday clap for key workers. We have seen so many people going the extra mile to care for someone. We have seen different professions working in teams and being imaginative about services. We have seen a growth in our spiritual lives as people look outside themselves to build their resilience.

What do I hope for? I hope we do not forget what we have learned. That we appreciate public services and the staff. That we look to how we better integrate our services and create employment conditions that provide security and do not plunge people into poverty. That there will be a focus on investing for the future by reimagining our structures, expectations, and responsibilities. Wherever we are in the world we are all in it together.

**Maureen O'NEILL** *(AFM member)*



## Belgium in the midst of European cacophony: work for the EESC



Belgium has experienced lockdown much like other countries. For the first time in its history, it saw the complete closure of restaurants, cafés, Sunday masses and schools and even the postponement of marriages. Culture, the sacrosanct football and a large part of the economy have come to a standstill, with dramatic consequences for some. Card payments, teleworking, online courses and examinations, and videoconferences have skyrocketed. Luckily, new technologies have partly offset some disadvantages. We are at a turning point in history.

Comments from world leaders have ranged from «a little flu» to pandemic, from injecting disinfectant products to promoting one miracle cure or another, from strict lockdown to easing measures and from talking about health to discussing the economy.

Every day, the statistics have arrived coldly at 11 a.m. and are compared to those from the day before and those of other countries.

Sometimes, we find out that somebody has been hospitalised. And all of a sudden, the numbness of the statistics gives way to other emotions.

At least there was unanimous agreement over paying tribute to the heroism of care professionals.

In the future, sociologists (and economists for other reasons) will have a lot to write about 2020, probably more than on 1492, 1789, 1914-18, 1929 or May '68. For the moment, however, the humourists and cartoonists have had less difficulty exercising

their talents. Not far from the EESC, the museum of natural history found a mask for its dinosaur, while not all inhabitants yet had one.



It all started with the rush on rice, flour and toilet paper. The supermarkets pulled out all the stops to show that there would be some for everyone.

More seriously, the metro's protective measures included only allowing passengers to sit in one in every three seats. This did not pose too many problems as people hardly moved around anymore.



The streets have emptied of cars and there are no planes in the sky.

Masks have become mandatory and we have to queue in front of shops that now only accept a limited number of people at a time.



Intergovernmental cooperation enabled those stranded abroad to return to their countries. For example, Belgians were repatriated through other countries' consulates and on their planes, and vice versa.

On the contrary, each country rushed in isolation to purchase masks, to decide to open or close their borders and to make other similar decisions. This has given the impression of a huge cacophony and very little has been heard from Europe on this occasion. It is true that the Treaties do not give Europe any competence in the area of health but when such an event reaches all countries, it will undoubtedly be necessary to think more «European» in the future.

The European Economic and Social Committee solemnly declared that we could only overcome pandemics together. Undoubtedly, the Committee will have lot to discuss and to propose with regard to this situation, on the importance of vaccine research at European level and on refocusing the economy. And perhaps we will too at our upcoming meetings, where I will be delighted to see you all again.

**Michel DE GRAVE** (AFM member)



## Fake news



*Letter from Mme de Sévigné to her daughter, Mme de Grignan, during a plague epidemic*

*Thursday, 30 April 1687*

Above all, my dear child, do not come to Paris under any circumstances!

People no longer leave their homes for fear of this plague that has descended upon us, spreading like wildfire. The King and Mazarin keep us all locked up in our apartments.

M. Vatel, who continues to receive his supplies of fish, provides our meals, which he has delivered to us.

I am saddened as I was looking forward to attending an upcoming performance of M. Corneille's «The Liar», of which I have heard great things.

We are rather bored and I can no longer regail you with the most recent intrigues of the Court, or the latest fashions.

Fortunately, I am able to discreetly visit my dear friend, Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette, and we enjoy reading the fables of M. de La Fontaine, one of which is appropriately named «The Animals Sick of the Plague»! «All were attacked, although all did not die».

I am sending you two funny masks; they are the height of fashion. Everyone at Versailles is wearing them. They give one a pretty air of cleanliness and prevent contagion.

All the best, my dear, to you and Pauline.

**Michel DE GRAVE** (AFM member)



## Other contributions





# The European Parliament elections



I was nominated as an MEP candidate by a small conservative-liberal political party in Finland (Svenska Folkpartiet). In the months prior to the elections, I participated actively in the campaign. It was a very interesting learning experience, offering the opportunity to meet a broad range of citizens, participate in public debates and panels, and outline and defend my priorities in the media, etc. It was great!

My involvement was widely appreciated, although I was not elected. I made many new valuable contacts and I believe that I was able to influence discussions about the EU and perhaps even affect forthcoming EU policy outlines. It was a serious and open citizens' debate.

I would like to strongly recommend that all AFM members consider how they can take part in EU debates at local, national, regional and EU level, perhaps even how they can become involved in forthcoming elections or nominations of representatives to various EU institutions, committees, etc. Because of our extensive experience, the EU really needs our input!

**Filip HAMRO-DROTZ** *(AFM member)*

I took up the challenge and stood as a candidate in the elections. I do not regret that decision. During the campaign, I underlined my commitment to working for a strong, safe and united Europe for future generations to live in. In this regard, I pointed out the importance of making the EU a more credible global player, which requires much better cooperation among the EU Member States. I also advocated the need for the EU to purposefully fight corruption, fraud and the misuse of EU funds, as citizens consider this a precondition for the credibility of the EU.

There are approximately 200 million citizens in the EU aged 50 and above (Eurostat 2018). AGE Platform Europe (based in Brussels) represents organisations of and for older people in all EU countries, and takes part in EU public debates. It strives to champion older people in the EU in the core areas of inclusive ageing, demography, intergenerational cooperation and digitalisation. Having become involved in defending the interests of older people at national and EU level after my retirement, I also promoted AGE Platform Europe's priorities in my campaign. I am happy to note that the new Commission for the first time ever included a policy of demographic change in its programme, nominated a vice-president in this area and intends to table a green paper on ageing.

# Europa Platform Hungary is here!



Europa Platform Hungary is a bottom-up forum open to civil society organisations and individuals interested in the future of Europe and ready to engage in meaningful discussions leading to a more efficient and democratic European Union. It was set up on Europe Day in 2020 in Budapest and today has more than 50 members.

Europe needs a fresh start and new approaches leading to genuine reforms. To promote this process, we aim to contribute to the success of the joint initiative taken by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission regarding the Conference on the future of Europe. The whole process cannot be conducted purely between governments and high-level policy-makers taking decisions behind closed doors. Openness, inclusiveness and transparency should be the hallmarks of our common work.

Our platform plans to organise wide-ranging information programmes, debates and events, draw up proposals and engage in dialogue in non-conventional forms with individuals with various views and experiences. We will kick off with an online debate on the current situation and future prospects of the Schengen system.

Europa Platform Hungary establishes partnerships with similar European citizens' initiatives and programmes. The work of Europa Platform Hungary is coordinated by European House Budapest.

The Conference on the future of Europe should start as soon as possible with an ambitious agenda!

More info:

<https://europeanhouse.hu/europa-platform-hungary>

**Miklós BARABÁS** (AFM member)

# WhiteDoveWay

## (Concept note)



*The WhiteDoveWay is a European path of peace stretching from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, linking the two divided islands on either side of the European Union and tracing the EU legacy of peace-building throughout Europe. It will include a European Peace Centre in Northern Ireland and educational «hubs» at historic sites along the way. It will also be a «Virtual Reality» educational tool used as a three dimensional learning experience for students and citizens to better understand and promote the EU values of tolerance, mutual respect, conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence.*

Following in the footsteps of Columbanus, the 6th century Irish pilgrim described as the Patron Saint of European unity, the WhiteDoveWay will pass through France, Austria and Switzerland to Bobbio in Italy where the «White Dove» was laid to rest. But the path of peace will continue beyond the original route proposed by the Friends of Columbanus, to carry his message of peace and unity to places which have witnessed war, conflict and division. From Ireland to Cyprus through the Western Front and the Balkans, it will serve to remind travellers of the EU way of achieving peace through compromise, consensus and confidence-building – a method known as the WhiteDoveWay.

Widely regarded as the greatest peace-building achievement in modern history, for which it won the Nobel Peace Prize, the EU could risk losing its collective memory of the very reason it was founded. As generations pass, the majority of European youth live in the comfort of never knowing or experiencing the horror of war. But Europe's most recent conflicts, in places like Northern Ireland and the Balkans, and the recent rise in terrorist-related incidents serve as sharp and constant reminders of the danger of division, the fragility of any peace process and the need to encourage and extoll the virtues and values which framed the European ideal.

In this way, the WhiteDoveWay serves not only as a practical means of engaging EU citizens, young and old, in a cross-border, transeuropean adventure, but also a journey of enlightenment. During their trek, travellers will discover people from different cultures and learn from those with direct experience of war, the pain of conflict and the futility of the fear of all that is «foreign». The path of peace will also trace EU steps to conflict resolution, beginning in Northern Ireland, where the EU PEACE programme helped lay the foundation of the Good Friday Agreement, then passing through former war zones, from which the EU was forged, and finishing in Cyprus, where healing division is «work in progress».

Following the Columbanus tradition of learning through doing, the WhiteDoveWay will set up peace-building educational «hubs» at important locations along the way. This will include a European Peace and Reconciliation Centre based in Northern Ireland, possibly on a two-site location in Belfast and L'Derry, for which European PEACE funds have been earmarked. This Centre will be the focus of global training and education on European conflict resolution and peace-building using real-life story telling from victims and survivors of the «troubles» in Ireland and those political and grass roots campaigners who fought tirelessly to promote and protect the peace process. It will also serve to recognise and respect the role that Northern Ireland continues to play as a «Special Place» for peace-building in Europe.

In practical terms, the WhiteDoveWay will be a multifaceted initiative including a «virtual reality» journey through the history of peace-building in Europe. This will be a state-of-the-art device for distribution in schools and universities throughout the EU allowing students to experience the reality of war and conflict resolution by walking a «virtual» path of peace from the comfort of their classroom. Not only will students learn more about the EU and how it built peace from the rubble of war, but the virtual reality experience will allow those less willing or able to make the journey to actively interchange with people of different cultures and creeds without leaving home.

There will also be opportunities to link with other cultural routes, such as the Camino de Santiago or the Western Front Way, and to include «branches» to and from places across the length and breadth of Europe wishing to connect with the WhiteDoveWay. It also could be divided into manageable segments for walkers or cyclists along the way. But the 3 500 km journey need not

only be travelled on foot, by bicycle or otherwise. The fact that Columbanus is the Patron Saint of motorcyclists means the motorbike would be the ideal mode of transport for the first of many journeys linking together biker fraternities along the route and bringing a new dimension to the idea of EU mobility and awareness.

The history of the European Union has been marked by momentous challenges which have spurred its leaders into joint action. This positive leadership is vital in times of crisis. The EU of the new millennium faces massive external and internal challenges caused, in part, by the rise in citizen empowerment and expectation due to the spread of information, including propaganda, awareness and action mainly through increased mobility and social media. The EU must channel this new energy in ways which will engage its citizens in the European project to the benefit of all. By combining the ancient travels and teachings of Columbanus with modern-day European freedom of movement and expression, the WhiteDoveWay provides a cultural crossroads between old and new Europe which positively engages European citizens, protects the European peace project and points a new way forward for the European Union.

A full version of the WhiteDoveWay proposal can be found on the EESC website on this link: <http://europa.eu/!BU34kB>

**Jane MORRICE** (AFM member)



# Association for Consumer Rights (ACR) Malta

## Plastics, Public Health and the Environment



### Main findings from the study on plastic production and consumption:

- **The packaging industry** uses about 40% of the plastic produced globally;
- **Households** use about 20% of the plastics produced worldwide for consumer products;
- **Women** buy basic consumer goods, such as food, health items, clothing and household products, more often than men;
- **Men** buy expensive goods more often, such as cars and electronic equipment.

### Plastics and hazardous chemicals:

- Studies, mainly from wealthy countries, show that both men and women may be at risk from hazardous chemicals during plastic production, usage and disposal;
- Very little research is available on the **exposure of the workforce** to hazardous chemicals in the plastics industry in less wealthy countries;
- Moreover, **on a global level there is very scarce gender disaggregated literature to be found about the number of workers in the plastic industry**, and their exposure to hazardous chemicals and resulting health effects during the several specific processes of plastic production and plastic waste management (i.e. recycling, incineration);

- Not only during production, but also **in daily life**, plastics, **including those in packaged food and PVC flooring, can release hazardous chemicals such as endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs)**, affecting both men and women;
- EDCs have also been **identified in personal care and cosmetic products (PCCPs)**, of which women are the biggest consumers.

**Management of waste:** Taking a global perspective, the low income and lower middle income countries dispose of far fewer amounts of municipal solid waste than the high and upper middle income countries. Nevertheless, landfilling of waste is still the most common practice globally. The EU collectively exports almost half of the plastics collected for recycling, at least 87% of which goes to China.

Although the household use of plastics in less wealthy countries is much lower than in wealthy countries, **the less wealthy countries contribute to a large extend to plastic litter in waterways and oceans due to poor waste management or the absence thereof**. Globally, 80% of marine litter is land-based, with five Asian countries contributing more than half.

**Environmental behaviour and gender roles:** Research shows that women tend to perceive various hazards as more risky in comparison to men and are less willing to impose health and environmental risks on others. However, waste management cannot generally be attributed to men or women, but there are gender roles, which may differ between cultures.

### Recommendations

**Studies show that in Europe** the fragmentation of plastic debris is the main source of microplastics, followed by tyre abrasion and pellet loss.

- Evidence indicates **that the uptake of plastic particles and associated chemicals through seafood consumption poses threats to human health**. Evidence also indicates **that microplastics can be transported through the placenta to unborn fetuses**.
- However, the amount and type of ingested plastic particles, and consequently the risks for human health upon consumption, depend on several factors and may vary between countries, species and populations of fish and seafood.

- To prevent future damage to human health and wildlife, **intentionally added microplastics in PCCPs, such as in toothpaste, shampoos, baby care products or cleaning and maintenance products, need to be prohibited as they are apparently easy to replace by harmless substances.**
- **The ACR stresses in particular the proposal that funding to incentivise alternatives to plastic goods should be made available, as we have become so dependent on plastic goods that we seem to be unable to do without them.**
- **Alternatives to plastic goods have to be incentivised, promoted and produced.**
- **Globally, accessible and affordable infrastructures for the safe collection and recycling of post-consumer plastics have to be put in place.**

Source: WECF Women Engage for a Common Future: Plastics, Gender and the Environment – <http://www.wecf.eu/english/publications/2017/Gender-and-Plastics.php>.

**Educational campaigns** on all levels targeting:

- Decision-makers;
- men and women, and the consequences of purchasing, reusing and disposing of plastic consumer goods for male and female consumers;
- impacts and sources of microplastics in the environment and in food, microplastics in PCCP;
- adequate plastic waste management – this needs to take place.

**Grace ATTARD** (AFM member)

**Biodegradable plastics:** based on the available evidence, it can be **concluded that biodegradable plastics will not contribute to a reduction in marine litter.**

- **Agents of change:** men and women can act as agents of change in order to reduce plastics related to basic consumption and to increase the recycling rate of plastics.
- Nevertheless, **awareness of the environmental problems related to plastics** has to be raised globally among men, women and decision-makers.
- **A reduction in plastic use in daily life requires a multi-sectorial approach.** A regional or national ban on plastic bags and plastic single-use disposable items is one way.
- **Moreover, retailers and in particular consumers are important stakeholders in achieving a reduction in plastic consumption at household level.**

# Combating plastic



As an addition to Grace Attard's very interesting article on the need to combat plastic, I would like to put forward my own experience and recipes.

I took the decision years ago to replace plastic food containers with glass ones. Then, I turned to cosmetic products - almost all of which are sold in plastic bottles on supermarket shelves. I opted for solid shampoo packaged in cardboard. I stopped buying toothpaste and make my own.

Recipe for toothpaste powder: 4 tablespoons white clay (8g), 1 tablespoon bicarbonate of soda (8g), ½ teaspoon finely ground salt, 2 drops essential oil of mint. Put a little of the mixture in the palm of your hand and apply to a damp toothbrush.

I stopped using shower gel and make my own liquid soap: add 45g grated Marseilles soap and 2 tablespoons vegetable glycerine to ½ litre of very hot water.

I also make my own deodorant: melt 4 tablespoons coconut oil in a small pan, mix in 2 tablespoons white clay, 1 tablespoon bicarbonate of soda and 5 drops essential oil of palmarosa. Place in a broad-topped shallow glass container and put in the

fridge to set. No need to keep it in the fridge after that. Rub a small amount under your arms each morning – you'll find it goes in very easily. The solution becomes a liquid again at temperatures of over 25° (keep in the fridge when the weather gets very hot).

In supermarkets, the cleaning product aisle is also filled with plastic.

I have replaced almost all products for cleaning kitchen and bathroom surfaces and taps with white vinegar.

With a few products packaged in cardboard or paper and tap water, I make:

- Washing liquid: dissolve 2 tablespoons grated Marseilles soap (you can get it in flakes) then 1 tablespoon soda crystals and 1 tablespoon black soap in 1 litre of very hot water. Wait for it to become lukewarm, then add 10 drops essential oil of lemon. When it has cooled, pour into an old washing liquid container. Shake before use. Dose for one load in a machine: 1 glassful (10cl).
- Dishwashing powder: 100g soda crystals, 100g citric acid, 75g sodium percarbonate. Mix with a fork. Store in a glass container (it will eat through plastic!). If the powder goes hard, you'll just need to stir vigorously with a fork. Fill washing powder compartment with the powder.
- Washing liquid for hand washing: ½ litre hot water, 3 tablespoons black soap, 2 tablespoons soda crystals, 20 drops essential oil of lemon.
- Floor cleaning product: ½ litre black soap, 1 tablespoon soda crystals, 1 tablespoon bicarbonate of soda, add a small amount of hot water. Dilute 1 glassful in a bucket of water to clean tiled floors.

I tried various «do it yourself» recipes I found online before opting for these ones.

**Béatrice OUIIN** (AFM member)

# Launching a debate on the future of the EU



Historically, Italians have always been among the greatest supporters of the European Union.

Over time this strong propensity towards European values has gradually waned.

What has changed?

First, political conditions have changed within individual countries. The European project was born of the push to overcome the divisions of the period following the First World War, which caused the birth of nationalisms, Nazism and fascism, which in turn led to the Second World War.

The 1951 Treaty of Paris, which established the ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community, was the first step towards pooling some important resources and regulating the production of coal and steel, industries that had fomented the arms race.

Today we are witnessing a revival of those nationalisms, in the guise of sovereignty and populism.

The construction of the Union was imperfect from the outset.

Petty jealousies, interests and grubby deals have affected the harmonious development of the Union, failing to take account of differences, failing to support the weaker economies with solidarity.

The lack of fiscal and social harmonisation created a weak euro, due to the absence of real supranational government of economic policies.

This lay behind the growing gap between citizens and a Europe they increasingly perceive as distant.

False narratives and an uninterested public opinion did the rest. A country as important as the United Kingdom went into the Brexit referendum bombarded by fake news and not effectively opposed by realistic, truthful information.

The centre-left in Italy is the only grouping with a minimum of consistency, striving to maintain a firm bond with Europe, which is increasingly cut off within its national fortresses.

We saw this return to nationalism with the social butchery that took place in Greece, but also in little Cyprus and which hit Portugal and Spain hard; we saw it with countries governed by the right (but not only) shutting off their welcome and solidarity towards the countries of the Mediterranean shore, which have undergone and continue to undergo migratory pressure coming from the global South.

This is food for careful thought, a debate on the future of the Union.

A no-holds-barred discussion is needed on the need for treaty reform.

The era of Maastricht is definitively over.

We need to rebuild a new, supportive Europe that founded on absolute equality and does not allow anyone to profit from regulatory asymmetries in fiscal, social and environmental matters.

We must move from the Europe of Harlequin to the Europe of Columbine, dresses in the clothes of solidarity, hospitality and social justice.

It matters less whether there are guaranteed bonds or not, and more whether there is a willingness to reclaim the great founding project of the Union.



The United States of Europe is no longer a topic for cultural debate, but a major political issue.

Italy in particular is interested in this process of strengthening European integration, capable of laying new foundations for the defence of a unique social model, different from the rest of the world.

We are truly at a crossroads: either we will be able to offer new paths, more advanced and more courageous solutions, or in this respect we will be doomed to be part of a group of countries facing only decline and the prospect of being subcontractors to stronger and more structured economies than ours.

In the absence of powerful political cohesion, the stability pact, born from the selfishness of the strongest economies – first and foremost Germany – is turning into the Tunic of Nessus for the peoples of Southern Europe.

Mario Draghi had understood this and his «whatever it takes» and the consequent QE plan, sounded the alarm and mounted the last great defence of Europe.

A very grey future for the new generations, and greyer still if we give up on the belief that this process can and should take place.

Sustainable development from an environmental and social point of view, the rebirth of the values and founding principles of cohesion and solidarity.

A new Europe must be built with the people who live in it.

**Edgardo IOZIA** (*Vice-president and treasurer of the AFM*)



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