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The urgency of the crisis and a time to reflect together

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The crisis linked to the CoVid-19 epidemic now plunges all societies in the world into a state of exception and a strange war made of both a sanitary emergency and a suspended time, for an indefinite period. Each individual and each organisation is now making arrangements until further notice, with the shared feeling of a long period of uncertainty and deep questioning about the very foundations of our societies, our economies, and our ways of living together: our view of the world will necessarily be profoundly modified.

New modalities of exchange, continuity of debates

Containment will give us a lot of time for reflection, and it is essential that our collective reflection be nourished as a very precious common good, so as not to add hasty conclusions or new sources of anxiety to legitimate concerns. It is the role of think tanks such as IDDRI to nourish our space for collective reflection, and to propose key questions to

structure it.

IDDR's policy is to maintain all its planned activities, as far as possible, and to transform all planned events, at least by the end of April, into streaming conferences, webinars or videoconferences, to continue fuelling the indispensable dialogues that all our societies need. The whole team is learning about integral teleworking, and is mobilising to continue to play this role together in the best possible way in the service of collective reflection. This inevitable experimentation with new modalities will allow us to take a step forward in our collective at work, in our social relations among ourselves and with our partners, our audiences and our readers! Do not hesitate to contact us to talk about it!

What questions are beginning to emerge from the crisis and fundamentally question our societies?

International vulnerability and coordination

The vulnerability of our interconnected societies is the first striking observation as we see the virus gradually affecting all territories on all continents. The interconnection between regions and countries is a fact, both biological and economic: societies in past centuries, even though they were much less efficiently linked by transport technologies, were subject to the same purely biological dynamics of pandemic spread; beyond trade, it is all our social exchanges, at the heart of human well-being, that constitute the basic link in the chain of spread. While emergency measures may require us to temporarily compartmentalize our territories to slow the spread of the virus, each person is inevitably a member of a global human society within a single planetary ecosystem. If the spread of a virus shows us once again that there are risks associated with this interconnection, it also shows us that it is essential to reappropriate this interdependence between everyone on the planet, and not to be under the illusion that anyone can be completely isolated.

On the contrary, the health recommendations illustrate very strongly the notion of co-responsibility, in particular the importance of considering each individual's behaviour with reference to the common good of public health, and of acting in an extremely coordinated manner, at all levels. Ex post, all systems for coordinating collective or public action will be questioned about their capacity to deal with an unprecedented crisis, inevitably leading to comparisons between the respective performances of different political systems and different regions: rather than a beauty contest where some might seek consolation for having made fewer mistakes than others, it will be essential to be able to objectively evaluate the positive and negative effects of various decisions, in a logic of collective learning.

In particular, the European Union and its Member States, a regional bloc that for decades has been inventing coordinated governance without a federal state, and which is currently at the epicentre of the health crisis, is urgently experimenting with a variety of strategies by trying to coordinate as best it can. The relationship between European citizens and their local authorities, their national governments and the European institutions will necessarily be transformed during this intense period, at a time when the Union is facing many other challenges, from the global environmental crisis to its own internal tensions. It will be essential that the political meaning that will be given to the lessons learned from this crisis can be based on objective assessments of the successes and shortcomings of our coordination capacity.

International diplomatic activity is also suspended sine die, as illustrated by the postponements or cancellations of many key meetings for global governance of the environment and sustainable development, while 2020 is set to be a major year for climate, biodiversity, the ocean and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Real contacts, at least between several countries to deliberate together, will nevertheless be indispensable if an ambitious agreement is to be reached between all the countries of the planet to protect biodiversity, or if major economic blocs such as

India, Europe and China are to jointly decide to announce increased climate commitments. The capacity for global coordination is therefore particularly affected by a crisis which however underlines the extent to which the governance of health, like that of all global common goods, requires very close coordination. In Europe as at the global level, the crisis reveals a politically fragmented world with many flaws in the ability of countries to act together, but we can still expect cooperation that seemed highly unlikely at cruising speed to become politically possible in the wake of certain crises.

At the crossroads of health, ecological and socio-economic crises

The current health crisis is very different from the ecological crisis, both in terms of its time scale and of the levers for action, and it would be risky to assert that one is the consequence of the other. However, it is difficult to escape the comparison between the effective capacity for general mobilisation for the health emergency and the very low impact that the state of climate emergency, officially decreed by the parliaments of several countries, has had so far on key economic decisions. However, acknowledging this contrast, while deplorable, provides very few keys to action. How can the questions raised by all the links that can be made between the ecological crisis and the health crisis be investigated? A first question concerns the role and perception of scientific expertise in support of individual or collective decisions. Trust in scientists was already a strong point in opinion polls, despite the accelerated circulation of non-referenced or manipulated information on social networks. The countless pieces of information on risks, future scenarios and recommendations that reach us in crisis and containment situations inevitably require distinguishing very different degrees of reliability, and scientific institutions are an indispensable reference in these conditions. The figure of the scientist in a situation of expertise alongside governments and each situation could, in the wake of this crisis, increase the power of scientists, as individuals or within institutions, but also their responsibility and exposure, and this well beyond health issues.

Whether it is possible for our societies and economies to suddenly stop, or at least to slow down the pace of activities to the bare essentials, also opens up an immense space for questioning, perplexity or contemplation. This is the astonishing effect that can be produced by maps showing the drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in China during the height of the crisis in that country. Everyone is well aware of the link between our industrial activity and our transport systems on the one hand, and environmental degradation on the other, but the current crisis reminds us just how far we have yet to deliver on the promise of dematerialising our economic growth. It is as if the only lever we have is a giant switch, with only two possible positions: either we have growth and emissions, or we stop growth and emissions. Here again, what can we learn as a perspective for action?

First of all, it raises once again with alarm the hitherto unresolved question of the real levers for decoupling our economic activity from its material impact on the environment, and more broadly between our prosperity and the material basis for economic growth. Secondly, the most important and worrying demonstration of this crisis will be the inequalities between citizens, as well as between countries, in the face of the brutal health and economic consequences of this crisis. The public debate is opening up on the forms of collective action and public policies that would make it possible to prevent such unequal impacts or to deal with them. The President of the Republic in France, for example, has stressed that the post-crisis world will necessarily be different from the pre-crisis world, and that certain goods and services must be considered to be outside the laws of the market, with implicit reference to health services. This rethinking of solidarity mechanisms could have a wider impact on our economy and public policies as a whole.

After the crisis, the time will come to repair its damage, particularly in economic and social terms. The idea of recovery plans is already making its way even more surely than after the financial crisis of 2008, especially in Europe where the European Commission had centred its mandate since the summer of 2019 around a form of green

recovery, the Green Deal for Europe. The social consequences of the current health and economic crisis will be very significant, and a financial crisis, devastating for households, businesses and the budgetary capacities of States, could be on its way. It will therefore be necessary to act as quickly as possible to support all those made unemployed or bankrupt by the crisis. Some voices are beginning to be raised in Europe to set aside the Green Deal, its environmental ambitions and regulations as much as its investment component, to allow a rapid economic recovery in line with the business models, technologies and organisations currently in place, rather than seeking to overturn them. However, it would be extremely damaging if the urgency led to the ambition of ecological transition being set aside. It is indeed at this point that it will be essential not to renew in an identical way a system where inequalities in terms of vulnerability and environmental impact would continue to be structurally embedded. Designing the instruments of the ecological transition of the Green Deal to serve as a way out of the crisis and reduce vulnerabilities and inequalities is part of the programme that needs to be addressed now. But the depth of the social, economic and financial consequences of the crisis are still difficult to measure today, and they could require even more drastic modes of action than those of a recovery plan. This situation would mean that a debate on a European scale would have to be organised very quickly, between citizens, economic and public actors from all Member States, at the crossroads of the health, ecological and socio-economic crises: but there is not yet a common European political space. IDDRI and its partners in the other Member States and in Brussels will work to ensure that the foundations for such a debate exist as soon as possible.

Finally, with the crisis, we are all experiencing concrete individual experiences of a very deep social, psychological, moral and philosophical questioning about our lifestyles and our consumption patterns, about what is essential and what is incidental. This is particularly true for our food, which is at the heart of the concerns of every household in a crisis situation, but which is also the subject of debate in the family or on social networks, at the crossroads of our incompressible material needs, the health and environmental traceability of products and the fundamental social dimension of meals eaten together. Lived solely as an experience of rationing, this crisis would not have all the depth that it is however so essential to give it, based on the very concrete need for human and social contact, of which we are the most rationed at this time, and which is currently felt by everyone: the relationship to our material needs and to our human and social needs will also emerge fundamentally changed from this crisis, and has all the potential to help us collectively re-discuss the essential priorities, those that we must cherish, and those for which we can envisage other ways of accessing them. By discussing them now, we may have the chance to change the way we organise our societies to live together.

PACTE VERT EUROPÉEN**CLIMATE****BIODIVERSITÉ****GOUVERNANCE****OCEAN****GREEN DEAL****COVID-19****HEALTH****VULNERABILITY**