

Diari de les idees 19



One more week, the Covid-19 pandemic focuses almost monographically on the attention of analysts and experts from around the world. The Diari de les idees also devotes a preferential space to this situation without neglecting, however, other topics of interest in international and European politics, economics and equality, or even climate emergencies and new technologies.

One of the most relevant effects of the pandemic is the dialectical battle that is taking place both at the geopolitical and other levels about the creation of meta-narratives trying to explain how different political systems in the world react to a crisis of this magnitude and about which countries or systems are the most efficient to fight the virus, reduce the number of deaths and stop the contagion. In this regard, Jean-Yves Heurtebise states in *Causeur* the Chinese government's propagandistic use of its Covid-19 management. He describes how efforts are being focused on exporting the narrative that the virus has been stopped by the proper management of the Chinese Communist Party. A narrative aimed at wiping Western countries for not following the Chinese model and not being sensitive to what it's called "sinoglobalization". A debate that must be placed within the context of the confrontation about world hegemony between the United States and the People's Republic of China, and in which *The Economist* emphasizes that this crisis will only worsen the relationship between the two superpowers. It also points out that the precedents in the current situation are the withdrawal of the Paris agreements, the trade war and the technological battle for 5G, which fuel the general hostility between the two countries. The geopolitical implications of the pandemic are also the subject of an interesting dossier published in *Foreign Policy* which brings together the thoughts and predictions of 12 thinkers around the world on the impact of the coronavirus. As an example, one of these authors, Stephen Walt, believes that states will be strengthened and re-legitimized, and this will also lead to a boom in nationalisms that will reverse hyperglobalization. A new context that can also reinforce the conflicting nature of international politics, drawing a less open, less prosperous and less free world.

At the European level, Josep Ramoneda writes in *El País* that the Covid-19 crisis has left its mark on the European Union, which has shown its inanity insofar as the states have

sidelined it. The time of emergencies has come and the rhythms of European technocracy are not ready for such a crisis. Once again Europe and its institutions have fall short. And this is another urgency for the day after: what is to be done with Europe after the crisis? The criticism towards the EU is also clearly stated in an editorial of the French newspaper *Le Monde* denouncing that the European reaction is scattered and lacks the basic principle of solidarity. At the same time, it also emphasizes that at the economic level, European coordination is still minimal and warns that the European Central Bank does not have much ammunition right now beyond the €37 billion put on the table, compared to the \$850 billion plan that the U.S. Congress will soon vote on.

In this context, tensions are emerging again between southern and central European countries over what are called “corona bonds” and also after the controversy raised by the statements of the Dutch Finance Minister Wopke Hoekstra questioning the management of the Covid-19 in countries such as Italy and Spain and the resounding response of the Portuguese prime minister António Costa who labeled this statement as “disgusting”. A debate analyzed by David M. Herszenhorn in *Politico* hinting at a structural mismatch over the European project related to both the principles and values that should guide the EU, such as solidarity between countries, as well as to the criteria and model of governance of the European institutions themselves.

As for Spain, *The Guardian's* Madrid correspondent, Gilles Tremlett, dedicates a very critical article to the Spanish government's management of the coronavirus where he exposed that Pedro Sánchez belated and clumsy reaction has led Spain to become one of the world's epicenters of the virus. He also criticizes Sánchez for taking more than two days to apply the state of emergency he had announced, which caused that a lot of people flew throughout the country to get to their secondary residences. Tremlett concludes that when the crisis is over, Spain will be very fragile because, as an example, during the 2008 financial crisis, unemployment increased to 27%, public debt skyrocketed, the industry entered into a severe recession and the same -or worse- may happen now. But now the solutions imposed a decade ago - austerity, job losses and pay cuts - will no longer be tolerated by the population.

Aware of the social and philosophical repercussions of the crisis, the renowned sociologist Michel Wieviorka considers the debate between democracy and authoritarianism that has arisen from the different policies used to manage the coronavirus crisis. He warns that extolling national unity and implementing measures that limit human rights in order to fight the epidemic can be the embryo of authoritarianism. Manuel Castells also writes on the repercussions of Covid-19 in *La Vanguardia* where he suggests that the new context denies the liberal utopia of “citizens of the world”. The liberal order could be one of the first victims of this pandemic and he concludes that we will hardly leave this experience uninjured: we may likely have to change our way of life, consumption patterns or our relationship with the world. So it could be that we came out regenerated, valuing much more the relationships of mutual support, solidarity and life. Also from philosophy, Slavoj Zizek analyzes the impact of coronavirus on the current economic model and points out it has uncovered the unsustainable reality of another virus, which, he says, infects society: capitalism. At the same time, he suggests that coronavirus also opens the

opportunity up to become aware of the society and that we have and the possibility of reinventing it. He finally stresses another paradox, as a kind of tragic hyperbole of capitalism: at a time when human beings are more individualistic and live in social anomy, now due to the pandemic, they are asked to isolate themselves further.

In the field of economics *The Economist* editorial warns that the economy is reacting much worse than expected by analysts. January and February data show that industrial production in China, which was projected to decrease 3% compared to last year, has in fact decreased 13.5%. Some sales, such as retail, have not fallen 4% but 20.5%, while fixed investment, which measures machinery and infrastructure spending, has decreased 24%, six times more than expected. Likewise, in *The Guardian*, Larry Elliott compares the current crisis to that of 1929, which caused structural changes, but also was the forerunner of World War II's conflagration. In the 1930's obsolete economic models and the gold standard were abandoned; Keynesian economic policies were adopted to address the situation, and unions emerged with more power; progressive taxes were established and the welfare state was consolidated; the political agenda shifted towards progressivism, and international bodies were created to ensure greater political integration. Ultimately, Elliott is wondering if all this could be repeated today and whether new ideas such as a universal basic income to tackle the crisis will be consolidated.

Furthermore, despite the pandemic, other topics continue to attract our attention. In international politics, we highlight an article about Democratic candidate Joe Biden published in *Foreign Affairs*. It portrays a candidate who shun the Trump Administration's authoritarianism, exacerbated nationalism and "liberalism", and proposes solvent alternatives to the loss of trust in democracy, hyper-partisanism, corruption, and extreme inequality. US foreign policy is also strongly criticized by Robert Fisk, who in an article published in *The Independent* claims that what is hidden behind the withdrawal of troops from Iraq is the unsustainability of a project to all lights exhausted and which means retreating into its shell regardless of the collateral damage caused to the local populations and to the old allies. The increasingly authoritarian drift of Vladimir Putin is also matter of concern, insofar as on the pretext of constitutional reform the Russian president seeks only the indefinite permanence in power by other methods. In an article published in *The New Republic*, Gregory Feifer warns that "Putinism" is the biggest threat to Russia's future because the Russian President has not been able to diversify the oil centered economics, nor has he been able to accelerate state investment in Russia and the necessary infrastructures, while at the same time his aggressive foreign policy has left Moscow with few allies.

As regards Catalan and Spanish politics the apocalyptic echo of the pandemic has failed to conceal the severity of the earthquake that shook the Spanish royal family once it has been known that who was the head of state for 40 years, in addition to its a major allocation from the state budget, obtained a millionaire commission for some business he carried out in the exercise of his functions, which he hid in opaque funds and protected in tax havens. A crisis, as Enric Company writes in *La Vanguardia* that shakes this key of vault which is the monarchy in the Spanish constitutional system, and as Miguel Pasquau points out in an article in *CTXT* is not a minor topic, because either Felip VI is able to convince of the

usefulness of the monarchy beyond an ideological fraction, or it will lose the only advantage it has over a republic, i.e. holding symbolically the ground for political dispute. Finally, despite the political storm unleashed by the Covid-19 crisis and which jeopardizes the credibility of the EU, negotiations have started with Macedonia and Albania for a future membership. In *Politico*, Jacopo Barigazzi points out that seeing past bad experiences when Eastern European countries joined the EU, now the 27 have given their approval in exchange for changing the rules governing the incorporation procedure, which will allow for stricter control over fundamental issues, especially the oversight of the judicial system and democratic institutions.

Europe that, on the other hand, also fails to address two important areas: immigration and gender policies. In *Social Europe*, Petra Bendel claims that the EU has failed to learn from the 2015 refugee crisis and is now paying the price, and stresses that by 2020 the situation has only worsened as the fragile European immigration structure now faces the crisis caused by the Turkish invasion of northern Syria compounded by the withdrawal of the United States. In the same journal, Eszter Kováts and Elena Zacharenko criticize the Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-25 drafted by the European Commission, as it focuses on reducing the gender gap as a mechanism that would optimize the economy and not on the eradication of inequalities and working conditions for women.

Another open front for Europe is the economy, beyond the crisis provoked by the hard fighting that took place a few days ago about the so-called 'corona bonds'. Indeed, these tensions are also a reflection of the already endemic problems that shake the Eurozone, which are usually attributed to geography, with the north of the eurozone on the one side and the south on the other, although the differences have more to do with economics and politics. However, the authors of an article published in *Social Europe*, also responsible for a recent report by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, argue that the north-south division of the eurozone can only be overcome by a confederal and cooperative model based on new common institutions and an increase in sovereignty sharing. Likewise, in a manifesto addressed to the EU and published in *MicroMega*, a group of economists points out the decisions the European Union should take to ensure its very existence. Among other things, they claim that the budget balance should only apply to current expenditures; EU governments should be aware that fiscal policy can be used counter-cyclically; and that surveillance criteria based on unreliable parameters such as potential GDP and the output gap should be abandoned.

With regard to climate emergency and environmental policies, Jan Cienski recalls in an article in *Politico* that cities are responsible for 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, which makes their commitment indispensable when it comes to reduce carbon emissions. He also stresses that the investment required to carry out the European Green Deal is 1 trillion euros. In the same journal, Marcel Cobuz gives a more optimistic view and considers that the Green Deal is an excellent opportunity to achieve decarbonization in the short term, supporting investments in decarbonization and ensuring the predictability of the carbon pricing; in the medium term, pushing the entire construction value chain towards increased use of low carbon materials, and in the long term, by changing the design of carbon pricing mechanisms from consumer emissions.

Last but not least, a brief note on Artificial Intelligence at a time when the proliferation of digital personal assistants and algorithms offering personalized advertising, etc. seems to announce that AI is already taking over the world. In a special dossier in *Politico*, Mark Scott qualifies this by saying that if we look at autonomous cars or facial recognition cameras, we will see that technology is far less intelligent than it may seem at first. He claims that the so-called General Artificial Intelligence, which can perform various tasks that copy human behavior, is still a myth and it will likely take decades before even the cleverest forms of AI can overcome humans in the complex tasks that shape our daily life. However, we also want to highlight the key contribution that AI can make in solving the Covid-19 crisis, whether by managing Big Data generated, by developing algorithms that can find pharmacological solutions to stop the virus or by contributing through robotics with new clinical or health instrumentation, as William J. Broad points out in *The New York Times*.

Diari de les IDEES

Dossier Coronavirus

Jean-Yves Heurtebise Le virus de la propagande

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Slavoj Žižek El coronavirus es un golpe letal al capitalismo y una oportunidad para reinventar la sociedad

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Foreign Policy How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic

Like the fall of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the coronavirus pandemic is a world-shattering event whose far-ranging consequences we can only begin to imagine today. Just as this disease has shattered lives, disrupted markets and exposed the competence (or lack thereof) of governments, it will lead to permanent shifts in political and economic power in ways that will become apparent only later.

To help us make sense of the ground shifting beneath our feet as this crisis unfolds, *Foreign Policy* asked 12 leading thinkers from around the world to weigh in with their predictions for the global order after the pandemic.

Titou Lecoq Le confinement ne nous soude pas, il nous divise encore plus

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Moisés Naim Le coronavirus Covid-19 sera un révélateur, des États et des personnes

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Kurt M. Campbell i Rush Doshi The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order

With hundreds of millions of people now isolating themselves around the world, the novel coronavirus pandemic has become a truly global event. And while its geopolitical implications should be considered secondary to matters of health and safety, those implications may, in the long term, prove just as consequential—especially when it comes to

the United States' global position. Global orders have a tendency to change gradually at first and then all at once. In 1956, a botched intervention in the Suez laid bare the decay in British power and marked the end of the United Kingdom's reign as a global power. Today, U.S. policymakers should recognize that if the United States does not rise to meet the moment, the coronavirus pandemic could mark another "Suez moment."

Alexandra Prado Coelho O vírus é o espelho de todos os nossos medos

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Gabriel Magalhães La vacuna de la esperanza

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Open Democracy COVID-19: last chance to reevaluate our values?

In recent months, we have seen how the coronavirus pandemic is paralyzing the economy and daily life of hundreds of millions of people around the world. Is this our last change to reevaluate our values?

Andrew Watt Welcome but inadequate: European measures to counter the corona crisis

The coronavirus and its associated illness, Covid-19, have rapidly spread across Europe. From an initial concentration of cases and deaths in northern Italy, all European Union countries are now affected, albeit to greatly varying extents.

Member states have initiated a swath of increasingly stringent public-health policies, including bans on public gatherings and, in consequence or by order, production stoppages. Some countries have banned all non-essential contacts outside the home—stay at home and read, French citizens were told by their president, Emmanuel Macron. National borders have been closed to various categories of person.

The cost in terms of lost output is set to be very considerable, even if the 'social distancing' policies quickly reduce new cases. Combined with the cost of counter-measures, fiscal-deficit and debt ratios are set to increase dramatically.

Yannis Varoufakis The coronavirus has intensified the euro crisis

On 18 March the European Central Bank (ECB) launched an emergency €750bn (\$820bn; £700bn) package to ease the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This came just one week after the ECB president, Christine Lagarde, was widely criticised for saying it was “not the job of the ECB to close bond spreads”, which caused borrowing costs to spike in some of the countries worst affected by the pandemic. Yannis Varoufakis, the renowned economist, Greek MP and DiEM25 co-founder, spoke to openDemocracy about the ECB’s latest intervention, and how the coronavirus pandemic is intensifying Europe’s pre-existing economic problems.

Gordon Brown In the coronavirus crisis, our leaders are failing us

It need not be this way but one of the most disastrous weeks in the history of global medicine and global economics has ended with country after country retreating into their national silos. They are fighting their own individual battles against coronavirus and in their own way.

Each country has, of course, its own distinctive health systems that it relies on, rightly values its own medical experts and the disease is at a different stage in each. But why is there, as yet, no internationally coordinated medical project - equivalent to the wartime Manhattan Project - mobilising all available global resources to discover a coronavirus vaccine and to fast-track a cure?

Why, as the disease engulfs more than 100 countries, has there been no consistent, coordinated global approach not just to tracking, testing and travel but to openly learning from each other about the relative merits of quarantine and social distancing? And why, when a world recession now threatens, is there not yet an attempt at a combined effort on the part of governments and central banks to deliver a global economic response?

Instead, ours is a divided, leaderless world and we are all suffering from the tendency to go it alone: an initial cover-up in Wuhan; China’s delayed reporting to the international community; the World Health Organization (WHO) meekly agreeing that the crisis was “moderate”; and even when on 30 January it apologised and declared an international emergency, still the world continued to receive confused travel advice.

Adam Tooze Coronavirus has shattered the myth that the economy must come first

Since the 1990s, faith in ‘the market’ has gone unchallenged. Now even public shopping has become a crime against society. The coronavirus shutdown of 2020 is perhaps the most

remarkable interruption to ordinary life in modern history. It has been spoken about as a war. And one is reminded of the stories told of the interruption of normality in 1914 and 1939. But unlike a war, the present moment involves demobilisation not mobilisation. While the hospitals are on full alert, the majority of us are confined to quarters. We are deliberately inducing one of the most severe recessions ever seen. In so doing we are driving another nail into the coffin of one of the great platitudes of the late 20th century: it's the economy stupid.

Branko Milanović The Real Pandemic Danger Is Social Collapse

As of March 2020, the entire world is affected by an evil with which it is incapable of dealing effectively and regarding whose duration no one can make any serious predictions. The economic repercussions of the novel coronavirus pandemic must not be understood as an ordinary problem that macroeconomics can solve or alleviate. Rather, the world could be witnessing a fundamental shift in the very nature of the global economy.

The immediate crisis is one of both supply and demand. Supply is falling because companies are closing down or reducing their workloads to protect workers from contracting COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. Lower interest rates can't make up the shortfall from workers who are not going to work—just as, if a factory were bombed in a war, a lower interest rate would not conjure up lost supply the following day, week, or month.

Henry Farrell i Abraham Newman Will the Coronavirus End Globalization as We Know It?

The new coronavirus is shaping up to be an enormous stress test for globalization. As critical supply chains break down, and nations hoard medical supplies and rush to limit travel, the crisis is forcing a major reevaluation of the interconnected global economy. Not only has globalization allowed for the rapid spread of contagious disease but it has fostered deep interdependence between firms and nations that makes them more vulnerable to unexpected shocks. Now, firms and nations alike are discovering just how vulnerable they are.

But the lesson of the new coronavirus is not that globalization failed. The lesson is that globalization is fragile, despite or even because of its benefits. For decades, individual firms' relentless efforts to eliminate redundancy generated unprecedented wealth. But these efforts also reduced the amount of unused resources—what economists refer to as "slack"—in the global economy as a whole. In normal times, firms often see slack as a measure of idle, or even squandered, productive capacity. But too little slack makes the broader system brittle in times of crisis, eliminating critical fail-safes.

Mohamed A. El-Erian The Coming Coronavirus Recession

The global economy will go into recession this year. The downturn will be sudden and sharp. And although a constructive response from policymakers, companies, and households could limit its duration, its effects will be felt for decades to come.

Most economic forecasts for 2020 predicted a year of steady if not rising growth. The International Monetary Fund's January forecast update saw growth picking up from 2.9 percent in 2019 to 3.3 percent in 2020. And there were plenty of reasons to be optimistic: the "Phase One" trade agreement between China and the United States, the reduction of Brexit-related uncertainties, and strong consumer spending, especially in the United States and Germany, which seemed likely to spur companies to proceed with delayed investment plans.

Jaron Lanier i E. Glen Weyl How Civic Technology Can Help Stop a Pandemic

The spread of the novel coronavirus and the resulting COVID-19 pandemic have provided a powerful test of social and governance systems. Neither of the world's two leading powers, China and the United States, has been particularly distinguished in responding. In China, an initial bout of political denial allowed the virus to spread for weeks, first domestically and then globally, before a set of forceful measures proved reasonably effective. (The Chinese government also should have been better prepared, given that viruses have jumped from animal hosts to humans within its territory on multiple occasions in the past.) The United States underwent its own bout of political denial before adopting social-distancing policies; even now, its lack of investment in public health leaves it ill-equipped for this sort of emergency.

Noam Chomsky Sanità devastata dal neoliberalismo

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Joan Benach La pandemia, detonante y espejo de la crisis de salud pública

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Josep Ramoneda Primera setmana: el futur tancat

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Le Monde Le coronavirus révèle les insuffisances de l'Union européenne

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Piotr Smolar Le coronavirus ou la primauté des Etats

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Frédéric Lordon Les connards qui nous gouvernent

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Editorial The Economist Paying to stop the pandemic

Planet earth is shutting down. In the struggle to get a grip on covid-19, one country after another is demanding that its citizens shun society. As that sends economies reeling, desperate governments are trying to tide over companies and consumers by handing out trillions of dollars in aid and loan guarantees. Nobody can be sure how well these rescues will work.

But there is worse. Troubling new findings suggest that stopping the pandemic might require repeated shutdowns. And yet it is also now clear that such a strategy would condemn the world economy to grave—perhaps intolerable—harm. Some very hard choices lie ahead.

Silvia Turin Coronavirus, perché tanti morti in Italia? Più interazioni sociali tra nonni e nipoti

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Miriam Pawel Is the Coronavirus Shaping the Future of How We Work?

Both the irony and the symbolism were evident as members of the California Future of Work Commission gathered in a virtual meeting, hastily rescheduled in the midst of an unfolding crisis.

The pandemic, and the recession all but certain to follow, threaten to pre-empt and overwhelm efforts to shape the future of work, and thus the future of California — how to create good jobs, reduce poverty and redefine relationships and structures to narrow the

enormous income inequality that overshadows the state's wealth and success.

Thus the recent meeting became not only an experiment for doing business in a post-coronavirus world but also a conversation laden with doubts, fears and aspirations about how the future may evolve.

The coronavirus will have a silver lining if it serves as the impetus for constructive upheaval, in the way that the sudden forced reliance on telecommunication is already having an impact.

Manuel Castells Tiempo de virus

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Yasmeen Serhan Democracies Must Learn to Work From Home

When it comes to guiding their country through a pandemic, many world leaders have led by example. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson demonstrated hand-washing. German Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested alternative ways of greeting others. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau went into voluntary self-isolation after his wife tested positive for the coronavirus.

But as the severity of the outbreak has grown, and as the demands on the public have become more stringent, the capacity for democratic leaders and institutions to lead by example has come under strain. Just as more and more people are being advised to stay home, officials around the world are having to run large departments and keep the machinery of government going. The restrictions on large social gatherings in places such as France and Italy are only just being implemented in legislatures.

Otto English Coronavirus' next victim: Populism

And yet all of this might still have an unexpected, long-term outcome; for while nobody in their right minds would welcome the spread of coronavirus, it could eventually bring about the death of populism.

This crisis is a wake-up call to us all. The virus has no respect for borders, blue passports or sovereignty. It demonstrates, fundamentally, that we live in an interconnected world; that we need nations to work together in times of crisis as well as times of peace, and that to achieve all of the above we need serious, sensible politicians of good intent at the helm.

In the meantime, as the self-promoting popinjays in Downing Street and the White House plough on, let's just hope that there are enough experts and grown-ups left to take back control from the virus.

Massimo Nava Quand le pouvoir est juste idiot

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Jared Diamond i Nathan Wolfe El próximo virus

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Nick Martin Against Productivity in a Pandemic

Boutique grocery stores have been raided of their oat milks, bars and restaurants have been shuttered or limited to delivery-only service, a growing pool of service and retail workers have lost their jobs, the NBA and MLB seasons have been suspended and delayed, Idris Elba and Tom Hanks have tested positive for the coronavirus. Slowly, and rightfully, the shock and surreality of the pandemic is setting in across the United States.

So life mostly sucks right now, plain and simple. And if you find yourself considering that fact, it's just as likely that you'll bump up against some unwelcome reminder that—in the face of historic disruption and uncertainty—*you can actually get a lot done in home isolation!* Did you know Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* while he was quarantined during the plague? Have you tried baking as a form of corona therapy? How about turning your living room into a home gym using soup cans for hand weights? INBOX: Want 19 easy tips on how to manage anxiety in the time of Covid-19?

Bret Stephens It's Dangerous to Be Ruled by Fear

Donald Trump's first instinct when it came to the coronavirus was to dismiss the threat as overblown, over there, and "totally under control." His second was to use the pandemic as an opportunity to show off his world-historical leadership skills by treating the virus as a threat on par with World War II.

Both reactions were driven by politics, not evidence. The first was unquestionably wrong. The second needs to be questioned aggressively before we impose solutions possibly more destructive than the virus itself.

On Thursday, Gov. Gavin Newsom of California commanded the people of his state to stay home. That's roughly 40 million people. He anticipates that about 25 million Californians will be infected by the virus over the next eight weeks.

Torsten Bell Economists told us what a pandemic could do. Who listened?

Just a few months ago, no one had heard of coronavirus. Today, it's profoundly changing how millions of people live. Policymakers have been playing catchup, not least on how to respond to the economic crisis. But experts (the ones Michael Gove said we'd had enough of) had pointed the way to what is now taking place. A World Bank paper on avian flu forecast that a severe outbreak would lead to a near 5% fall in global GDP, and double that in Europe. That work, done in 2006, seems much closer to where we are headed than almost all the forecasts done in 2020.

A US congressional budget office paper from that period examines the economic impact of various sizes of pandemic, from a repeat of the 1918-19 Spanish flu to the less lethal Hong Kong flu in the 1960s. It is particularly prescient.

First, it notes that modern flus will spread faster and cross national borders. Tick.

On short-term economic effects, it points to a surge in demand for hospital equipment, capacity pressures on staff, a collapse of air travel and a period of people quarantining themselves, thus driving down retail sales. Schools would then close, causing widespread workplace absence.

So far, so familiar. But what about the long-term? The good news is that growth picks up pretty quickly post pandemic - our job is to get there.

The conclusion? Schools might be closed, but history lessons should continue.

Manuel de Carvalho A hora mais grave e mais nobre da União Europeia

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Larry Elliott The coronavirus crisis may lead to a new way of economic thinking

Rishi Sunak says the measures he has announced to support the economy are without precedent in peacetime, and he's right. Never before has the British state agreed to pay the wages of those at risk of losing their jobs. Never before has the government ordered the pubs to shut.

The chancellor is not the only one to see the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic as akin to a military operation. Boris Johnson sees this as the summer of 1940, with himself as Churchill.

Harking back to the second world war is inevitable given how strongly influenced Britain is by an event that ended 75 years ago, but there are some key differences.

The main one is that between 1939 and 1945 the economy was running at full tilt. It took the fight against Hitler to finally eradicate the high unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s. Britain had full employment and would have had rising inflation had it not been for rationing and price controls.

Contrast that with today. There are as yet only estimates of the likely hit to the economy from Covid-19, but they range from very bad to catastrophic. The consultancy Capital Economics has estimated a 15% drop in output in the second quarter of 2020 but said it could be 20%.

Ingrid Guardiola El capitalismo de plataforma está acumulando mucho más poder y más rápido

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Nesrine Malik This virus is ravaging rich countries. What happens when it hits the poor ones?

Though Africa has fewer coronavirus cases and a slower rate of infection than the UK, many countries in the continent have passed dramatically more extreme measures to prevent its spread than Britain has. In my birth country of Sudan, after only one case and one death was registered, all schools and universities were shut down. Several other nations, such as Egypt, have taken the ultimate precaution and closed their airports.

There is no denial here, no mixed messaging, and no unfounded promise of how soon we will send the virus packing.

The tough and timely action is borne less out of political maturity than it is bitter experience, and an awareness that already overburdened public healthcare systems cannot sustain an onslaught. The ebola epidemic of 2014 is still fresh in the mind in sub-Saharan African countries; it was an experience that showed prevention and containment are the only hope of fending off thousands of deaths.

Emine Saner 'Think about the best-case scenario': how to manage coronavirus anxiety

Just over a week ago, our world looked very different from how it does today. The shift has been so rapid and frightening, it feels as if the ground beneath us has given way. It is disorienting, as if normal life is just over there, out of reach. I have been through two major bereavements, close together, and this has the same unanchored feeling of grief.

The human brain is not wired to tolerate uncertainty, but it is wired to be alert to any threat. So, if you are feeling pandemic panic, it is only natural. Blame your brain. For most of us, life has never felt more uncertain, and uncertainty is, according to [a 2016 study by neuroscientists at University College London](#), an even more stressful state to be in than actually knowing something bad will happen. It may explain - if you're young-ish and otherwise healthy - why you may be almost hoping to contract Covid-19, just to get out of that will I-won't I? mental tussle. Those of us who are older or more vulnerable don't have such a privilege.

Michel Wieviorka ¿Democracia frente a autoritarismo?

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Toby Matthiesen The Coronavirus Is Exacerbating Sectarian Tensions in the Middle East

The novel coronavirus is advancing across the Middle East, straining frail public health services and exacerbating preexisting political and sectarian tensions, both within states and between regional rivals. Most of the [region's earliest cases](#) of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new virus, were traced to the [holy city of Qom](#) in Iran, whose renowned Shiite seminaries and Sayyida Fatimah al-Masumah shrine draw aspiring clerics and devout pilgrims from across the Shiite world.

Iranian officials have given conflicting accounts of how the virus first arrived in Qom, alternately blaming [Chinese Muslim students](#) in the city's religious seminaries and [Chinese workers](#) building a high-speed rail line there. What has since become clear, though, is that once the virus reached Qom, a city of about 1.2 million people, it spread quickly. Iran's government reported two deaths from COVID-19 in Qom on February 19, the first time it admitted that the virus was present in the country. By February 27, cases had been reported in 24 of Iran's 31 provinces. And as of March 23, the virus had infected more than 23,000 people in Iran and killed more than 1,800, including at least a dozen [government officials](#); because coronavirus testing in Iran is limited to the most severe cases, the World Health Organization has said that the true number of infected people in Iran could be [up to five times higher](#) than the official figure.

Carissa Véliz La privacidad en tiempos de coronavirus

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Donatella Della Porta Social movements in times of pandemic: another world is needed

Times of pandemic bring big challenges for the activists of progressive social movements. They are not a time for street activism or politics in the squares. Freedoms are restricted, social distancing makes the typical forms of protest impossible to carry out. Mobilization is not only difficult in public places but also in our places of work, given the very strict limitation on the right to meet and the reduced opportunity for face-to-face encounters. The continuous emergency constrains our mental spaces, challenging our creativity. Individual and collective resources are focused on everyday survival. Hope, that stimulant for collective action, is difficult to sustain, while fear, that so discourages it, spreads. Crises might trigger selfish defensive choices, turning the other into an enemy. We depend on governmental efficiency and expert opinions.

Vivien Schmidt The EU responds to the coronavirus: déjà vu all over again?

The European Central Bank refuses major action. European leaders hunker down. They fear contagion from others. The European Commission's measures are woefully inadequate. No, I am not talking about the eurozone crisis. This has been the EU's response to the coronavirus crisis.

At the beginning of the eurozone crisis in 2010, country after country fell to market contagion. To avoid bankruptcy and ejection from the currency zone, countries 'at risk' suffered harsh austerity programmes, which slashed health and education budgets as well as job and welfare protections.

No wonder the Italian health services are struggling today to cope with the coronavirus crisis. Doctors have to decide who lives (the young) and who dies (the old), while businesses face bankruptcy and workers risk penury. The disastrous economic policies related to the eurozone crisis have left Italy struggling to respond.

David M. Herszenhorn Democracy in critical care as coronavirus disrupts governments

Coronavirus is forcing governments to conjure up survival skills — not just for their citizens, but for democracy itself.

Faced with unprecedented disruption to the decision-making machinery of government — including travel bans and social-distancing restrictions on large meetings — officials in capitals worldwide have scrambled to adopt new working methods, including meetings by videoconference, and remote voting by ministers and parliaments.

Many legislatures, including the European Parliament, have already canceled all but the most essential meetings and debates until further notice — an acceptance, however reluctant, of the enormous logistical obstacles they now confront.

But there are also worries of potentially dangerous breakdowns in checks and balances, as well as concerns that authoritarian-minded leaders could exploit public fear over the pandemic to weaken democratic institutions at a time of vulnerability.

William Davies The last global crisis didn't change the world. But this one could

The term “crisis” derives from the Greek “krisis”, meaning decision or judgment. From this, we also get terms such as critic (someone who judges) and critical condition (a medical state that could go either way). A crisis can conclude well or badly, but the point is that its outcome is fundamentally uncertain. To experience a crisis is to inhabit a world that is temporarily up for grabs.

The severity of our current crisis is indicated by the extreme uncertainty as to how or when it will end. The modellers at Imperial College - whose calculations have belatedly shifted the government’s comparatively relaxed approach to coronavirus - suggest that our only guaranteed exit route from enforced “social distancing” is a vaccine, which may not be widely available until the summer of next year. It is hard to imagine a set of policies that could successfully navigate such a lengthy hiatus, and it would be harder still to implement them.

The Economist Amid the pandemic, Sino-American relations are worsening

A crippling pandemic would seem to be an occasion for the world’s two biggest economies to set aside differences and work together. Instead relations between America and China are nearing their darkest point since the crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Amid the crisis, the two countries are engaged in bitter name-calling and tit-for-tat struggles. Some Chinese officials have been promoting a conspiracy theory that the American army brought covid-19 to China. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has taken to calling sars-cov-2 the “Chinese virus”. One reason why he might wish to emphasise where the virus originated is that curbing travel from China was one of the few actions he took swiftly to fight it. More cynically still, Mr Trump is once again stoking a distracting media debate about his choice of words—whether he is being racist, as critics charge, or standing up for America by telling the truth. That is far more comfortable terrain than examining why he downplayed the virus for weeks.

Juan Luis Cebrián Un cataclismo previsto

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Santiago Alba Rico i Yayo Herrero ¿Estamos en guerra?

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Giles Tremlett How did Spain get its coronavirus response so wrong?

It is one of the darkest and most dramatic moments in recent Spanish history. In the chilling table of daily dead from the coronavirus pandemic, Spain has taken top position from Italy - with 738 dying over 24 hours.

Spain is now the hotspot of the global pandemic, a ghoulish title that has been passed from country to country over four months - starting in Wuhan, China, and travelling via Iran and Italy. As it moves west, we do not know who will be next.

What went wrong? Spain had seen what happened in China and Iran. It also has Italy nearby, just 400 miles across the Mediterranean and an example of how the virus can spread rapidly and viciously inside Europe.

Yet Spaniards cannot blame that proximity. There are no land borders with Italy, while France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia - all countries that are doing much better - do have them.

This may, in fact, be one of the reasons for the country's late response. Spain thought it was far enough away. "Spain will only have a handful of cases," said Dr Fernando Simón, the head of medical emergencies in Madrid, on 9 February. Six weeks later he gives out daily figures of hundreds of deaths. The number of dead per capita is already three times that of Iran, and 40 times higher than China.

International politics and globalization

Robert Fisk The Middle East doesn't deserve Trump and his troop 'repositioning' - at least have the guts to call it a retreat

Few can forget the words of Tony Blair's government aide hours after the World Trade Center was destroyed on 9/11. "It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury," wrote Jo Moore. Donald Trump obviously thought the same thing.

As the coronavirus pandemic sweeps over America, he has ordered US troops to abandon three vital military bases in Iraq - to spare them further attacks from Iranian-supported Iraqi Shia fighters.

Trump has always boasted of the need for withdrawals - but this was a retreat. The official

line - that the US was “repositioning [sic] troops from a few smaller bases” - was almost as laughable as the final US marine abandonment of Beirut in 1984 after months under fire from Shia militias. Almost four decades ago, the Americans said they were “redeploying to ships offshore”.

Joseph Biden Jr. Why America Must Lead Again

By nearly every measure, the credibility and influence of the United States in the world have diminished since President Barack Obama and I left office on January 20, 2017. President Donald Trump has belittled, undermined, and in some cases abandoned U.S. allies and partners. He has turned on our own intelligence professionals, diplomats, and troops. He has emboldened our adversaries and squandered our leverage to contend with national security challenges from North Korea to Iran, from Syria to Afghanistan to Venezuela, with practically nothing to show for it. He has launched ill-advised trade wars, against the United States’ friends and foes alike, that are hurting the American middle class. He has abdicated American leadership in mobilizing collective action to meet new threats, especially those unique to this century. Most profoundly, he has turned away from the democratic values that give strength to our nation and unify us as a people.

Gregory Feifer Putin Is Perfecting His Authoritarian Model

çades are everything in Russia. Vladimir Putin learned that the hard way in 2011, when he let his own façade slip at a party convention and publicly admitted to an end run around the country’s constitutional term limit on presidents. His hand-picked successor, Dmitri Medvedev, announced that he would step aside to allow Putin to run again for his old office; Putin then capped this with an arrogant announcement that he and Medvedev had settled “several years ago” on arrangements for the former intelligence officer to return to the Kremlin after his loyal caretaker’s single term. Although Putin’s move surprised few Russians, his open admission that it had been engineered was an insult to even the most apolitical citizens. The mass protests that followed prompted a shaken Kremlin to respond with a new wave of repression that continues to this day.

Daniel Torunczyk Schein An era of extremes seems to have started in Latin America

Latin America exploded again. For months the region has been convulsed again by a new cycle of protests. For decades, the social tensions caused by neoliberalism and populism have remained unresolved. Latin America is the most unequal and violent continent in the world. Suddenly the covers of different newspapers ask: What is happening in Latin America? Given the socio-economic conditions established by neoliberalism in the region and the failures of populist governments, one should ask why do the protests should stop?

Latin American society is a social earthquake that no one can foresee when, or where, or

with what intensity it will explode. Most of its inhabitants live in frustration and a state of permanent exasperation. In Chile, for example, 60% of its population gets into debt to cover their necessary expenses for the month. Any political decision taken by governments the pockets of workers can trigger the protest. In Ecuador, current President Lenin Moreno decided to withdraw the fuel subsidy to comply with an austerity program agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Sebastián Piñera, President of Chile, had decreed an increase of 30 pesos of the subway ticket.

Chandan Kumar i Shweta Damle How India is on the verge of a massive refugee crisis of its own making

India is grappling with a complex set of economic, environmental and social disenfranchisement issues of the poor and the vulnerable. We are witnessing unprecedented protests from people from diverse walks against the recently amended Citizenship Act 2019 (CAA), the National Population Register (NPR), and the National Register for Indian Citizens (NRC).

Before we begin to explore other facets of this Act, we need to understand that the NPR and NRC are part of the same Citizenship Act. Accordingly, there is an atmosphere of fear that a combined implementation of this amended Act along with the NPR and NRC will adversely affect the poor, marginalized, migrants, women, trans-gender, and tribal people. The very first issue will be that they will be deemed 'doubtful voters', and would lose their voting rights. In short, they will be completely stateless and voiceless.

Catalonia, Spain and Europe

Enric Company Una crisi real

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Miguel Pasquau Liaño Alarma monárquica

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Jacopo Barigazzi EU moves closer to opening talks with North Macedonia and Albania

The EU is moving closer to opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, at least in part because of a determination to show that the bloc can still function despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The bloc's foreign and Europe ministers will on Tuesday discuss a proposal, seen by

POLITICO, on opening talks with the two Balkan countries and are expected to give their backing. The talks will be held by videoconference. As the EU decision-making process has been affected by coronavirus, diplomats say one element behind the decision is a push to show that it is still able to operate. The EU “demonstrated it remains operational,” said a Croatian official.

Democracy, diversity and culture

Eszter Kováts i Elena Zacharenko How the new EU gender strategy fails east-central European women

The alarmingly rapid spread of the coronavirus has exposed the depth of the care crisis in Europe. As more and more countries shut their schools and nurseries, someone will have to take care of the children—and it is advised that this should not be the grandparents, as they face higher risks if they contract the virus. Elderly people’s need for special protection demonstrates what feminists have long highlighted: Europe is struggling with eldercare infrastructure, at home and institutionally, and in both settings women carry out the lion’s share of the work.

Now that the healthcare system—a heavily feminised sector—is under pressure, it becomes abundantly clear who is doing these jobs, under what conditions and with what recognition. The Covid-19 crisis is exposing inequalities, not just between men and women but between women of different classes and regions.

Petra Bendel Europe’s refugee policy: walking headlong into disaster

For the second time in quick succession, the European Union has ignored the warning signs and finds its asylum and refugee policy mired in crisis. It has failed to learn from the experience of 2015, when it had been clear for some time that the wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq would drive large numbers of refugees to Europe. However, the first host countries received no support, thus compounding the situation. It had long been clear that the inadequate solidarity and sharing of responsibility with those EU border states overburdened under the Dublin system would create a human-rights emergency in the reception centres of Italy and Greece.

After refugees arrived in droves, the EU member states ultimately sealed off the Balkan routes, built new border fences, ramped up the resources of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex and, alongside other partnerships with third countries, concluded the EU-Turkey deal.

Economy, welfare and equality

Andrea Boitani i Roberto Tamborini A eurozone reform northern and southern countries can share

The paralysis of reform of the European Union, in particular of the monetary union, is usually seen as stemming from geography, with the northern eurozone (NEZ) countries on one side and the southern eurozone (SEZ) countries on the other—although the divergences have more to do with economics and politics.

In a recent [report](#) for the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, we argue that the north-south divide in the eurozone can only be overcome with a confederal and co-operative model, on which the SEZ and NEZ might agree as it contains a balance of costs and benefits. The basic assumption is that new common institutions are necessary and there should be a move towards sovereignty sharing.

MicroMega “Ue e Bce, non è così che si supera la crisi”. L’appello di 103 economisti

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Sustainability and climate change

Jan Cienski Decarbonizing cities to meet EU goals is a question of money

Think of the EU’s [Green Deal](#) program to become climate-neutral by 2050 as a pyramid. Up on top, the bloc’s leaders have made the mid-century target the core of the new European Commission’s program. That aim has to be approved by national governments (something that’s being worked on). Then those goals get transmitted further down the chain to end up at municipal governments.

The transmission belt that begins with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen ends with local officials like Justyna Glusman, Warsaw’s coordinator for sustainable development and greenery, who has to figure out how to revamp her city with very limited financial resources.

“Cities face all kinds of challenges. They are seen as opportunities but they are also seen as those who have to take the responsibility for driving climate neutrality,” said Katarzyna Szumielewicz, program manager at the Commission’s Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, speaking at a recent POLITICO working group on how cities can reduce their carbon footprint.

Globally, cities need to invest \$1.8 trillion a year to become carbon-neutral, according to a [report](#) by the Coalition for Urban Transitions, an NGO. It calculates that the investment would generate annual returns worth \$2.8 trillion in 2030, and \$7 trillion in 2050 based on cost savings alone.

Marcel Cobuz Fast forward to carbon-neutral cities

Let's fast-forward to 2050.

Marc and Luisa are strolling around the streets in their new neighborhood. Like a large proportion of Europeans, they live in one of the Continent's major cities. They felt motivated to move to this big city to enjoy the quality of life that such modern urban environments offer. Issues such as air pollution, poorly isolated buildings and carbon-intensive electricity sources are a memory from past decades. The European Union's Green Deal had been decisive in driving cities to fully integrate the principles of circularity and carbon-neutrality across the economy, including buildings and infrastructure. It led to the mainstreaming of innovative building materials — mainly concrete based and highly recyclable. In fact, cities have even turned into permanent carbon sinks through the widespread use of materials such as concrete that permanently absorbs CO₂.

Marc and Luisa stop in front of the city's landmark tower. Built 20 years earlier, in 2030, it is still state-of-the-art in terms of climate performance. It uses resilient and high-performance materials, such as insulating mineral foam which enable it to maintain its energy consumption close to zero. The materials were chosen based on their lifecycle carbon performance (accounting for manufacturing, the use phase and its end of life). Aligned with the EU Green Deal, construction norms and standards were reviewed to make climate and environmental performance the focal point in new construction. It has driven the construction sector to integrate climate performance across its value chain and to competitively deliver climate-neutral buildings and infrastructures.

Alfons Pérez i Samuel Martín-Sosa Activismo climático para la nueva década

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The Guardian On Europe's green deal: stick to the plan

Difficult and almost impossibly daunting as it may seem, the world is faced with not one but two existential crises and two races against time: the coronavirus and the climate emergency. Dealing with both is going to require extraordinary focus and resolution.

Already there is a whiff of political opportunism in the air. Last week, the Czech prime minister, Andrej Babiš, said that the €1tn [European Green Deal](#), unveiled and enshrined in

law by the European commission barely three weeks ago, should be put to one side. Member states, he advised, should concentrate all resources on combating a pandemic which, one by one, is shutting down societies and economies. Along with other eastern European states such as Poland, the Czech government has been reluctant to acknowledge the scale of action required to combat global heating, which would have a severe impact on fossil fuel industries in their countries.

Innovation, science and technology

Wassim Chourbaji How Europe's AI strategy is getting it right

The European Commission's new White Paper on artificial intelligence (AI) may be the most ambitious yet realistic government strategy for AI we have seen.

Aimed at fueling development of an AI ecosystem that fosters innovation and growth for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) while building on traditionally strong European sectors — industrial, transport, agriculture and tourism, for example — the strategy suggests concrete governmental and industry measures for creating a “dynamic data-agile economy” without sacrificing the privacy or personal data of consumers and businesses.

That nuance is important, and often lost in global public debates about AI. Cutting-edge AI technology pursued by Qualcomm through our R&D center in Amsterdam will allow AI operations to take place on your device, to avoid sending your data to third parties in the cloud and to keep it under your control. Privacy guarantees and the construction of a technological and data-driven economy are not in a zero-sum equation. The Commission's new strategy recognizes that “building an ecosystem of trust is a policy objective in itself, and should give citizens the confidence to take up AI applications and give companies and public organizations the legal certainty to innovate using AI”.

Melissa Heikkilä The Achilles' heel of Europe's AI strategy

Europe's plan to ride a new wave of AI innovation into a technological renaissance relies on companies sharing their data with researchers and entrepreneurs.

But will the companies play along?

According to interviews with industry groups representing Silicon Valley, European tech companies and Germany's industrial base, the answer for now is: maybe, but only to a limited extent, and even then only when sharing data will not benefit rivals.

“We haven't seen any single company speaking up in public saying it was a great idea,” said Alexandre Roure of the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA), a tech lobby whose members include Google and Facebook.

Mark Scott Artificial intelligence isn't as smart as it thinks

Digital personal assistants, software that can trounce board game champions, algorithms serving up customized online advertising — wherever you turn, artificial intelligence appears to be taking over the world.

But look past the self-driving cars and facial-recognition cameras, and you'll see that the technology is a lot less intelligent than it may at first appear. It's likely to be decades, at best, before even the smartest forms of AI can outdo humans in the complex tasks that make up daily life.

"The real world is a complicated, messy place," said [Michael Wooldridge](#), program co-director at the Alan Turing Institute, the United Kingdom's national center of excellence for data science and artificial intelligence. "What it would take to create general human levels of artificial intelligence is something like the Apollo 11 program. It will take decades to evolve."

M. Victoria S. Nadal La llegada del 5G reabre el debate sobre la electrosensibilidad, un síndrome sin base científica

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