



Young Aspen Leaders

# A Comprehensive New European Architecture

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## Introduction: critical dimensions for a decisive turn

The Indian novelist Arundhati Roy was right when she wrote that “the pandemic is a portal<sup>1</sup>”. It is a multidimensional portal through which European people simultaneously experienced major mutations from a technological, geopolitical, anthropological, and sociological perspective. Such a portal is akin to Lewis Carroll’s metaphorical mirror, revealing what was already there: our troubles, doubts, and hesitations. Not only as individuals, but as a political folk.

Our societies are antifragile complex systems, “antifragility” being the quality for a given system to reinforce its global resiliency after having been threatened, even severely pressured<sup>2</sup>. That is why the Covid episode has not been a catastrophe – at least so far – but has *only* been a major crisis<sup>3</sup>. The difference is epistemologically important because it implies very different outcomes. We should postulate that what are hopefully the final days of the pandemic will present a collective opportunity for Europe to substantially transform its societal model.

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<sup>1</sup> A. ROY, “The Pandemic is a Portal”. *The Financial Times* (April 3, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Taleb defines antifragility as “a convex response to a stressor or source of harm (for some range of variation), leading to a positive sensitivity to increase in volatility (or variability, stress, dispersion of outcomes, or uncertainty, what is grouped under the designation “disorder cluster”). Likewise fragility is defined as a concave sensitivity to stressors, leading to a negative sensitivity to increase in volatility. The relation between fragility, convexity, and sensitivity to disorder is mathematical, obtained by theorem, not derived from empirical data mining or some historical narrative.” (N. N. TALEB, *Philosophy: “Antifragility” as a mathematical idea*. *Nature* (Feb. 28, 2013)).

<sup>3</sup> I develop that essential epistemological difference in my PhD thesis: “De la précarité épistémologique des systèmes complexes en transition critique étendue : vers une épistémologie ouverte des processus de marché”. *Ecole normale supérieure-PSL* (2021).

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In his speech to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1952, Alcide De Gasperi, one of the founding fathers of Europe, stated:

*Economic cooperation is, of course, a matter of compromise between the natural desire for independence of each participant and overriding political aspirations. If European economic cooperation were dependent upon the compromises put forward by the various administrations concerned, we should probably be led into weaknesses and inconsistencies. So it is the political aspiration for unity which must prevail. We must be guided above all by the overriding realisation that it is essential to build a united Europe in order to ensure for ourselves peace, progress, and social justice.*

Europe is not an economic and bureaucratic project; it goes far beyond that. It encapsulates our ability to build a stable and prosperous world. Peace, progress and social justice is the fundamental triptych I will use as a basis to present the post-pandemic critical dimensions of the *decisive* turn we must take as Europeans.

## **I. How to ensure peace**

### **From a globalised to a compartmentalised world**

The French debate distinguishes “*mondialisation*” (“worldisation”) from “*globalisation*” (“globalisation”): many geographers like Lévy or Ghorra-Gobin<sup>1</sup> consider that the former describes the process according to which cultural, political and economic flows intensify whilst scaling up in a *compressed* spacetime. The latter is deeply rooted in the metamorphosis of capitalism from an aggregation of local markets to the emergence of an interconnected and financially transnational agglomeration<sup>2</sup>.

We need to rethink the worldization-globalization model and turn it towards “compartmentalisation”. From an economic point of view, Ricardo’s comparative

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<sup>4</sup> C. GHORRA-GOBIN (dir.), “Dictionnaire des mondialisations”. Armand Colin (2006).

<sup>5</sup> A. APPADURAI, “Modernity at Large. Cultural dimensions of globalization”. University of Minnesota press (1996). We follow in that part the argument proposed by C. Ghorra-Gobin in “Notion en débat : mondialisation et globalization”, *Géconfluences* (2017).

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advantage theory, which served as a basis for the global and liberal capitalism in which we live, is proving to be inadequate in our current situation where the consequences of maintaining such a model are beginning to matter, whether they be ethical, ecological, or cultural ones. Both realism and pragmatism are the only ways to succeed in overcoming the North-South, Western-Eastern, Progress-Tradition antagonisms. Compartmentalised socio-economic blocks are part of our new reality. Even when imposed by *others*, we need to accept the reality of their existence whilst still acting to defend our project embodying the ideal of universal humanism and democracy.

Compartmentalisation, as a concept, goes beyond multipolarity. First, it recognises the importance of geographical proximities and commonalities (nuclear incidents or air pollution are good examples). Then, it implies that a block/compartment is a piece that can combine with another to form a bigger one (when greater market power is favoured) or scale down (when agility is required). Last, we need to accept the perpetual nature of history: remnants of the past persist and are fundamental in block ontology.

Europe as a block needs to find a way of reconciling progressivism and tradition, security and freedom as well as democracy and sovereignty.

## **There is no nation without borders**

The nation-state model is not over. It can be perfectly compatible with transnational institutions, binding the heart of a nation with its head. It can also cope with necessary strategic alliances to ensure such a nation's integrity. That is what international politics is about.

Prophecies announcing the end of nations are fallacious because a nation is not only a political project; it is what Ernest Renan described when he said:

*A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which, properly speaking, are really one and the same constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is*

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*present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received.*

Such a perspective holds nations to be deeply rooted in our anthropological nature as social human beings.

Borders are not barriers, they are limits. Being geographically rigid does not imply that nations have no plasticity as regards other cultures, solidarity, free markets, values, etc. In fact, borders are the result of self-determined nations peacefully and closely living together, ensuring a degree of safety and allowing dynamic links within the supra-blocks nations are part of. As such, they must be preserved and protected.

## **Environment cannot be an ideological issue**

Dealing with environmental topics requires embracing extreme complexity. Paradoxically, the public debate is poisoned by over-simplification as well as biased argumentation. The IPCC's mission statement provides a good illustration of an institution whose theoretical mission is ostensibly beneficial for humanity, but insufficiently balanced in its concrete proposition. The IPCC's mission statement clearly outlines that:

*The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the international body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.*

Scientific investigation is driven by scepticism; an attitude which does not allow one to simply assume that current consensus is correct. Such investigation necessitates that both positive and negative effects of a phenomenon be studied. Surprisingly, the IPCC's mission statement cited above is strongly oriented towards proving anthropic responsibility and speculating on the subsequent risks. Potential positive outcomes of

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climate evolution are thus widely understated, not allowing a proper understanding of the magnitude of the studied changes.

From a semantic perspective, no advanced civilisation should manipulate the dangerous concept of “crisis” without properly anticipating the consequences of such a choice. The Covid pandemic demonstrated the cost, in terms of democratic and social adhesion, of such manipulation. Therefore, we should collectively act with the adequate degree of responsibility regarding climate change.

Economic contraction, ecological terror and acceptance of technological regression will not bring anything but fear and instability. The desirable way of dealing with any environmental topic is to bet on human genius. Technology is not a threat when pursued ethically. Speeches which deliberately present information in an imprecise, abstruse manner designed to limit further inquiry and understanding cannot be acknowledged as a possible alternative to science simply because radical thinking refuses a scientific path that does not conform to a predetermined conclusion or bias. Finally, no moral or physical violence should be ignored or tolerated for reasons of “necessity or urgency”. Contemporary revolutions should be respectful and free from bloodshed.

## **2. What is progress on the other side of the mirror?**

### **The Metaverse is already here but we cannot see it: the “virtual-space”**

*Facebook's* mutation to *Meta* is neither new, nor exactly a turning point. The Metaverse already exists but is widely neglected as the old Internet paradigm still prevails. Web3 should deeply reshape the way global interconnectivity is established, shifting from an intermediary-based model to an algorithmic, decentralised one. However, modern democracies do not seem ready for this as they are still widely anchored in a pre-Web2 digital world.

The Metaverse is not yet adapted to Web3 however, we need to fully accept it already exists in its Web2 form, where a vast majority of users are not only digital consumers, but have developed a real and proper alternative cyberidentity. Together, alternative

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web identities, whether they be clearly identifiable or anonymous, form a digital “virtual-space” with its own meta-political rules.

Digital progress is about protecting the Internet as a free and equal universe, whilst understanding that states have some sway where its running and regulations are concerned. Although still artificial and heavy, GDPR is a good example of a positive initiative that regulates privacy and enforces certain human rights in the digital space.

## **All about scaling up**

Europe is the right scale to put real digital sovereignty in place. Between Gafam and BATX, a void is not an acceptable option. Five basic fundamentals should be developed to allow the emergence of European champions: a transnational open data culture, a sovereign Cloud infrastructure, an integrated tech capital venture network, unified digital Acts, and reasonable economic protectionism. All must be underscored by an end to the passive tolerance of cyberthreats: online insecurity is widely understated with limited expertise and resources dedicated to online justice and policing. Efforts must be mutualised so that we can catch up in time.

## **Freedom and surveillance capitalism**

Freedom is perhaps the core value of Europe. At the very least, it has served as a guiding principle for Europe’s founding fathers. Accelerating technological progress is creating its own threat in the form of *surveillance capitalism*, which is becoming increasingly prevalent despite the will of the people. Harvard American author and sociologist, Shoshanna Zuboff<sup>6</sup>, describes the phenomenon in very harsh terms:

*1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification; 3, A rogue mutation of capitalism marked*

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<sup>6</sup> S. ZUBOFF, “The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power”. *Public Affairs* (2019).

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*by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history; 4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy; 5. As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth; 6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy; 7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty; 8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.*

According to us, such a definition should not be taken as a description of the way events are occurring rather, as an attempt to anticipate the inevitability of a generalised, capitalistic surveillance system, and what this would look like. There is an urgent need to seriously anticipate what an economy based on data and services implies in terms of human rights.

The fact that non-democratic countries are opting for coercive mechanisms, like social credit systems, that limit freedom through technologies is an opportunity for Western countries to build an alternative scheme that is respectful of freedom whilst remaining realistic regarding the use of private data for security enhancement or value creation.

The pandemic has highlighted the illiberal choices being made by decision-makers all around the world. Ex post we collectively need to rethink the way such an extreme situation has been handled to retrospectively redesign an optimal approach to crisis management.

### **3. True social justice requires honesty**

#### **Tempering the debt state model**

Our modern democracies should be ruled by a strict non-contradictory principle according to which it should not be possible to discriminate in order to fight discrimination (affirmative action often raises more issues than it brings solutions) or

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magnify marginal causes whilst massive ones are ignored. Diversity means diversity: it should be profitable to everyone in its singularity as a sincere effort of reaching *equality of chances*, not as an artificial framework to favour some against others under the obsession of *equality of outcomes*. This is not sustainable in the long run, as it necessarily produces negative social consequences.

Of course, social justice is first about living human beings. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to adopt a multi-generational perspective. The *awakening* on environmental issues leading to people caring for the world they will leave to others should also guide the way we act regarding our macro-economic choices.

Of course, European standards pertaining to financial deficits exist, but they are insufficient as main western democracies suffer from widely relying on a *debt-state model*, which is proving to be suboptimal for the system as a whole and for some of its components in particular. In such a model, governing means dealing with two people: on the one hand what Wolfgang Streeck names *Staatsvolk* and, on the other hand, the *Marktvoll*<sup>7</sup>. According to the German sociologist, debt states are “buying time”. In doing so, they have to deal with contradictory democratic and capitalistic dimensions, constantly balancing between the following quasi-antagonisms: “national vs. international”, “citizens vs. investors”, “civil rights vs. claims”, “voters vs. creditors”, “elections vs. auctions”, “public opinion vs. interest rates”, “loyalty vs. confidence”, “public services vs. debt services”.

Debt is not an issue *per se*. It becomes one when it overcomes any reasonable way of dealing with it in the long run; decade-long monetary policies should not be seen as normal economic situations.

## Countering the rise of neo-populism

They are two types of populism in contemporary times. The first one revolves around anti-democratic politics and occurs when the people stop defending a harmonious social project to instead become a mass. The second one is related to the abandonment of power to tribal groups. Such setups notably occur when parapolitical

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<sup>7</sup> W. STREECK, “The Politics of the Debt State” from “Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism”. Verso (2014).

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counter-powers are imposing their grievances on the majority, benefiting from their minority status and employing them as a *social resource*. Universalism is a two-sided notion; although contributing to the constitution of anyone's intimate self, belonging to a minority group cannot entirely define an individual. As such, it cannot provision extra privilege to one person over others. On the other side, no minority situation should justify minor rights, chances, or statuses. Humanism cannot stand asymmetrical or unfair treatment of people.

## **Overcoming the identity paradox**

The Western world is increasingly being trapped in an identity paradox, being ashamed or pushed to be ashamed of its own cultural, historical, and philosophical legacy, whilst blindly celebrating any other form or alternative one. There is no need for the West to deny its own identity to be truly and enthusiastically open to others: our occidental tradition is a proof of this . Deconstruction is a threat to the global system, as it necessarily makes alternative schemes emerge. The rise of nationalist populism in Europe is directly linked to such a process. Another consequence is the emergence of new anti-science or religious obscurantism.

All the main developing countries are founding their growth on solid cultural pride. They are to be commended and respected for doing so. Promoting our occidental values is not only consistent with this, it is a pre-requisite as cultures do not significantly enrich themselves without positively *competing* with others.

Redefining the European model starts with accepting our noble values *as they are*. It also requires firmly refusing any radicalism in the political debate.

## **Conclusion: a prospective governance for a truly comprehensive new European architecture**

The pandemic can be seen as a portal: from tactical crisis management to strategic crisis management. Passing through it entails enriching our democratic methodologies with intelligent and dispassionate prospective debates. Europe should

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build a true prospective agency in charge of thinking about the conditions conducive to desirable futures. IPCC endeavours will always remain limited in their impact if they remain incomplete via the lack of a truly multidimensional and multidisciplinary analytic institutional framework.

That is the starting point of a truly comprehensive new European architecture. Free markets do not imply complete self-organisation as markets will never be fully efficient, especially in the long run where they simply cannot continue expanding. Long term is the domain of politics, i.e. the domain of taking informed *risks* as the future is not a given, and never will be.

Nevertheless, we have clues about what will matter in the coming decades. The priorities of our times shall be: quantum technologies, nanobiology, genetic medicine, green techs, civil and military space capabilities, AI, decentralised web and bioethics notably linked to transhumanism. Any new European architecture should be able to prioritise these topics otherwise its risk of failure becomes probable. No European country on its own has the critical size to deal with these new areas of technological advancement, but Europe united has the capacity to do so.