

# EU's Interdependencies in the COVID-19 Crisis

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***Abstract:** The main purpose of this study is to highlight, from a perspective of globalisation and power relations, the interdependencies manifested at the level of the European Union (EU) during the first year of pandemic crisis. The EU needs to redefine priorities, acknowledge more the importance of the interdependencies, and establish a more inclusive development strategy for the following years. We will also focus our attention on the responses and guidelines drawn by Member States and institutional actors, in order to analyse the efficiency of those decisions. The pandemic crisis must be seen as an opportunity for relaunching the Union, which will have to take into account all necessary measures to streamline the process of European integration that constitutes the challenge of the new Europe.*

***Keywords:** European Union, integration process, interdependencies, crisis management, COVID-19 pandemic.*

## Introduction

The paper aims to make a short analysis on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the relations between Member States of the European Union. We aim to identify the types of European interdependencies that manifested themselves during the pandemic crisis and what their impact was. Also, our analysis aims to present an x-ray of 2020 from the perspective of the actions taken by the actors involved in the management of the pandemic crisis. Our analysis revolves around three research questions: What was the state of the Union when the pandemic erupted? What were the responses of Member States? What are the interdependencies identified in the European Union during the first year of the pandemic?

If someone had told us at the end of 2019 that the whole world was about to be affected by a new coronavirus, with huge effects on to the world economy, limiting security and human rights, severely reducing free movement inside Europe, maybe we would have smiled politely and would have said that it seemed highly unlikely. But that, in the event that this would have actually happened, Europe was ready for such a scenario.

The magnitude of the pandemic transcends traditional geographical borders between states, altering it from a national health problem into a global security problem. Despite the wave of unpredictability that hit Europe and the whole world, but also the initial chaotic response of some states, the political response has emerged rapidly and comprehensively both at EU and national level. European leaders have had the ability to provide clarity and persuade state actors, the most legitimate actors in the international

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system<sup>2</sup>, as being a global issue, the necessity of global strategies/responses that can be achieved through creating diverse, strong and inclusive partnerships, in a world of paradoxes were urgently needed.

States need to be aware that health and security are important, but also that neglecting existing economic problems can have devastating effects over the states that are on the brink of collapse.

In the first phase, the actual situation of Europe, even though it drives to the weakening of regions, must not lead to the escalation of nationalist temptations and reduced cross-border cooperation, but to urge the states towards an approach that encourages solidarity. International relations will intensify, as the whole process of globalization will undergo significant changes affecting everyone.

Europe was caught unprepared by this pandemic, leading to an acute lack of leadership and effective crisis management. This, in turn, revealed the asymmetry of institutional structures, the shortcomings of the medical system, the lack of an ability to react promptly at Union level, the importance of security, of interdependencies and a common approach in global issues, but the European Union has always managed to surpass crises, remaining united and continuing the reinforcement of its own capacities.

The lack and need for leadership that Ursula von der Leyen spoke about, in the speech she gave in her appointment, was in full display during the first months of the pandemic, as demonstrated also by the initial measures and guidelines produced by the Commission: "Our leadership is not about self-serving propaganda. It is not about Europe First"<sup>3</sup>. For this inability to manage the situation, the blame lies with both the leaders in Brussels and the individual Member States, as the lessons of the past have not yet been learned. Nearly 10 years after the end of the Economic Recession and at a time when the pandemic crisis has crossed state borders, European leaders are proving once again that they do not have the capacity to respond quickly and adequately. We consider that economic relaunch measures like NextGenerationEU and measures in other domains in order to address the effects of the crisis were taken with delay.

This is due to the wrong trajectory of the leaders of the states in recent years who, to the detriment of the identification and use of common European goods<sup>4</sup>, have only sought to build their own image. Thus, lacking a solid foundation and against the background of the acute lack of common strategies and cooperation, the leaders Member States faced the prospect of realizing the importance of cooperation in a world of global interdependencies.

The European Union tried to prove efficiency to react promptly, proving efficiency, coherence and institutional coordination in the decision making, against the background of inefficiency of the strategy of managing the previous economic crisis, over which the current pandemic crisis overlapped. This situation produced serious consequences not only in the health field, but also in the economic, social and political,

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Sarcinschi, "Rolul actorilor statali în configurarea mediului internațional de securitate", [The role of state actors in shaping the international security environment], Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I", 2010, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary*, 16 September 2020, Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_20\\_1655](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655), Accessed on 01 December 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Vasile Pușcas, Interviewed by Cosmin Puris for Ziarul Faclia, 01.04.2020, Available at <https://www.piatafinanciara.ro/fostul-negociator-sef-al-romaniei-cu-ue-vasile-puscas-a-fi-singur-pe-lume-inseamna-autocondamnare-la-pierzanie/>, Accessed on 20 March 2021.

the situation seems out of control, with some measures being taken with the sole purpose of reassuring public opinion<sup>5</sup>.

It is very clear that, after this pandemic will have passed, the European Union will no longer be the same, whether we are talking about economic, human or interstate relations, leadership or common policies, Europe will have a new face. The priorities will change, the extended involvement with neighbouring countries will be multiplied and the long-term objectives of the Union will be rethought. We consider that the priorities will change according to the new context, that the European Policies will take into account the reformulation of the basement of the lesson-learned from pandemic.

National resilience and recovery plans can be the tool through which states, aligning with the Commission's priorities and leveraging European policies, can create a crisis response strategy designed to ensure a sustainable recovery that is favourable to inclusion<sup>6</sup>.

Member States must acknowledge the fact that their own interests cannot be reached while overlooking the interests of neighbouring states. National difficulties do not end at the physical border of states. Solidarity and cooperation remain some of those essential imperatives of ongoing times.

In the history of the last century, we can say with certainty that the greatest achievement of the continent is the European Union. The EU initially aimed to create a peaceful space in which bloody wars would be replaced with interstate cooperation. With the passage of time, and the intensification of interstate cooperation, the Union has focused on taking measures designed to lead to cooperation, economic growth, encouraging growth and eliminating borders. All these initiatives that were the basis of forming this construct, continue today to be the main purpose of the member countries, but also of those who aim for membership of the European Union<sup>7</sup>.

The European Union has experimented, learned and can be said to have progressed in raising awareness of the value of partnerships. It is slowly beginning to show that it does not want to repeat the mistakes made during previous crises. And also that, as a result of the dynamics of the international environment long-term projections are uncertain, the wisest strategy is establishing partnerships. Thus, we are reminding about the proposal of the European Commission to conclude partnerships between the European Union, state and non-state actors. The main focus of this partnership is to boost the transition of the EU to a greener, more competitive and resilient one, and the long term effects will be felt in the fields of environment and employment as well<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2020), "Recovery and Resilience Facility", Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en), Accessed on 10 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2015), "Territorial cooperation in Europe. A Historical Perspective", Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/information/pdf/brochures/interreg\\_25years\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/information/pdf/brochures/interreg_25years_en.pdf), Accessed on 08 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2021), "EU to set up new European Partnerships and invest nearly €10 billion for the green and digital transition", Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_702](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_702), Accessed on 24 February 2021.

### **The European Union's response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

In the early days of the pandemic, Takeshi Kasai recommended<sup>9</sup> that for better management of a threat to health security, the Member States of the World Health Organization, and also external partners, should join forces and focus their attention on the five key points needed to strengthen health security. The first action that was needed to be taken, is the modernization of disease surveillance systems at the local level. For a more efficient reaction in crisis situations, quickly determining the source of the disease can make the difference between disaster and being able to handle the situation correctly.

If the problems are of greater complexity, the systematic evaluations and the collection of information from multiple sources, together with the consolidation of the decision-making systems by offering quick answers to the problems that concern the health of the population, are the elements that describe the second key element necessary to strengthen health security<sup>10</sup>.

The third action recommended by Takeshi Kasai, is to collaborate and cooperate between states with a view to carrying out actions designed to bring real benefits to global public health such as keeping water and fresh air. Transnational collaborations need to be intensified now, the best public health strategies can only be made based on clinical, epidemiological, effective genomic exchange data<sup>11</sup>.

States have the obligation to be aware of the fact that global issues are affecting them and nationalist solutions only lead to further fragmentation and international instability. He brings into attention the importance of constructing the future, by making collective efforts meant to recover the global economy<sup>12</sup>.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, and up until the moment of writing (April 2021), the European Council and the European Parliament have tried to offer an institutional response, as coherent, consolidated and unitary as possible, with the intention of creating a common vision, an efficient strategy in order to surpass this difficult and remarkable episode from the history of the Union.

In order to have an overview of the evolution of the pandemic crisis, we provide a brief summary of the actions undertaken by the European institutions in 2020, actions undertaken with the main purpose of managing the pandemic crisis and providing a common direction of action.

The **European Council** brings the political leaders of all Member States around the same table, being the European institution that stands out through its political weight. In the first conference held on 10 March 2020, the European Council established its four main initial priorities: limiting the spread of the virus, providing medical

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<sup>9</sup> Takeshi Kasai, *Coronavirus outbreak shows Asia needs to step up infection preparation*, January 2020, Accessed on 24 March 2020, Available at <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/commentaries/detail-hq/coronavirus-outbreak-shows-asia-needs-to-step-up-infection-preparation>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Miller, MD, Cecile Viboud, Marta Balinska, Lone Simonsen, *The Signature Features of Pandemic Influenza - Implications for Policy*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, March 2020, Accessed on 01 April 2020, Available at <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMp0903906>.

<sup>12</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order", *The Wall Street Journal*, 03 April 2020, Available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>, Accessed on 29 May 2020.

equipment, promoting research and combating socio-economic effects<sup>13</sup>. The lack of coordination and leadership mentioned above was felt by the lateness of the actions taken. Between the moment of the outbreak of the pandemic and until the approach of the pandemic from the perspective of European funds, three months passed, during which some states acted in an individualistic, uncoordinated and chaotic manner.

If the frequency of meetings reveals the interest shown in the topics and agreements concluded in the first year of the pandemic, we could affirm that the European Council is very concerned about the evolution of the current pandemic context, this can be concluded because it met 14 times compared to the average of four annual meetings. We note, however, that the frequency of these meetings cannot be attributed exclusively to the concern of European political leaders in the face of the relentless virus but rather, against the background of the lack of a common vision on resource allocation and preventing the spread of the virus.

The aim of the *European Commission* in its first pandemic year was to provide a common European response to the coronavirus epidemic. It demonstrated coordination in its mechanisms and procedures to stop the spread of the virus and reduce its socio-economic impact<sup>14</sup>. Thus, the measures taken by the Commission aimed at combating disinformation, border management measures, free movement of workers, laying the foundations of a European Health Union.

In the field of economic measures, the Commission has set up the SURE mechanism whereby Member States can receive up to 100 billion euro to create or expand national technical unemployment programs, a temporary solution taken in an exceptional situation of which primary objective is sustaining companies and people in work.

Also, through NextGenerationEU, the Commission will be able to borrow up to EUR 750 billion from the markets. We also mention here the additional financial support for small and medium-sized enterprises severely affected, the package of measures to support the agri-food sectors most affected by the coronavirus crisis<sup>15</sup>.

In the field of the Commission's Strategy for Vaccination of the Population, the European Commission seeks to expedite and facilitate the authorization of vaccines, to provide support to increase the production capacity of vaccines and to ensure a sufficient quantity of vaccines to immunize Member States.

The European Commission proposed and presented a post-pandemic recovery plan, a strategy meant to prepare Europe in case of an eventual future crisis. The strategy has the main objective of using the EU long-term budget with a view to relaunch the Union and sustainable growth. NextGenerationEU is a new relaunch instrument proposed by the Commission, whose funds will be redirected in order to support Member States' investments, relaunching the EU economy through stimulating private investments, and also towards programs meant to prepare the Union for potential future issues of the medical, social and humanitarian systems.

The RescUE belongs to the Commission and it intends to prepare the European

<sup>13</sup> European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2020/03/17/conclusions-by-the-president-of-the-european-council-following-the-video-conference-with-members-of-the-european-council-on-covid-19/>, Accessed on 17 March 2021.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission (2020), "Răspunsul Comisiei la coronavirus, pe domenii de acțiune" [Overview of the Commission's coronavirus response], Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/overview-commissions-response\\_ro#combaterea-dezinformrii](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/overview-commissions-response_ro#combaterea-dezinformrii), Accessed on 07 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

Union for the reappearance of waves of the pandemic, thus conceiving a common stock of medicine, medical equipment and lab materials. The need for digitalisation is strong, as it continues to be a priority for the budget of 2021-2027.

The influence in the negotiation of each state differs depending on the percentage of its contribution to the Union budget, its influence on the world trade scene, the power of absorption and the expenditure of foreign aid.

Given the dynamics of the global context we can see how the European Union, under the *German Presidency of the EU Council* (second half of 2020) has made remarkable progress, took unprecedented decisions, using the power of European negotiations to establish the European budget, finalize the amounts allocated to relaunch funds, an European climate goal. Germany handed over the rotating presidency of the EU Council to Portugal, whose main concern is managing vaccination by accelerating production and distribution, streamlining the vaccination campaign, limiting viral mutations, implementing a vaccination certificate or limiting non-essential travel restrictions which aims to promote a resilient, social, ecological, digital and global Europe<sup>16</sup>.

An important role in crisis management was also played by the European Parliament, which represents the voice of European citizens in the European legislative process. It has played an important role in adopting the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union Budget, in implementing the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan. The Conference on the Future of Europe is held under the coordination of the European Parliament, and comes to offer citizens the opportunity to get involved in shaping future European policies. The initiative belonging to the Commission was later taken over by the European Parliament.

We conclude by saying that the European institutions, even against the background of the acute lack of leadership felt by the political leaders of the states, have resorted to all the means at their disposal to stimulate and guide the Member States towards post-pandemic economic and social recovery. But we must admit that national government authorities cannot be replaced by the European institutions<sup>17</sup>.

### **European Union, globalisation and the EU's interdependencies**

In this subchapter we aim to highlight the interdependencies that have been identified at Union level. These are manifested in the sectors of security, economy, health, in terms of policies, but also of consequences (social, economic, political, and cultural).

The European Union has made major changes both at macro and micro level. Whether we are talking about how people relate to each other, the introduction of the euro, the reduction of barriers between the states of the Union, the creation of common foreign and defence policies, all these actions have led to the strengthening of relations, the increase of interconnectedness and the transformation of the European Union into

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<sup>16</sup> European Parliament, "Președinția portugheză a Consiliului: ce așteaptă eurodeputații", [Portuguese Presidency of the Council: what MEPs expect], Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/headlines/eu-affairs/20201208STO93328/presedintia-portugheza-a-consiliului-ce-asteapta-eurodeputatii>, Accessed on 05 March 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Vasile Pușcas, Interviewed by Cosmin Puris for Ziarul Faclia, 17.03.2021, Available at <https://ziarulfaclia.ro/uniunea-europeana-si-romanii-in-vreme-de-pandemie/?fbclid=IwAR1P0EU2bMvrfKmFk2a5tRi5m5Icwk3V6vLCXqzhDMvr1uG-1N6heMUKs4A>, Accessed on 19 March 2021.

an economic and political actor who can “play” globally<sup>18</sup>.

The new political-economic links, the intensification of trade, the encouragement of mobility, globalization, the creation of alliances meant to increase the security and the defence capacity of the states. It became more than a cluster of like-minded states under the aegis of the European Union, it became a powerful engine, a community strongly interconnected, a whole unit whose goal is set for peace, freedom, security, cultural and linguistic diversity, economic union, respect for fundamental human rights, all aim to achieve prosperity<sup>19</sup>.

States have different visions, perspectives and national interests. Through the connections they have, the access to the Union is diverse. However, the Union remains the most advanced and complex example of regional integration in the world. The European Union has been and continues to be a space of prosperity and security, a promoter of democracy, freedom and prosperity<sup>20</sup>.

We all live in a globalized world where states are strongly interconnected and where foreign policy has left its mark on the dynamics of states. Globalization can be defined as the assembly of cross-border links that lead to the rise of interdependencies in all of societies' essential domains<sup>21</sup>. As a consequence of the dynamics of the world, of globalization and international development, the states emerged in a position that managing internal security issues of the state is not sufficient in order to provide the comprehensive safety of its citizens, whereas internal and external security are connected. Thus, the states have started a collective effort to identify and eradicate the factors that can destabilize, and to continue to have the ability to protect their citizens and their interests.

Against the background of globalization, state interdependencies have demonstrated that unanimous and uniform answers in the face of global issues are important. The internal problems of a state present risks to the external environment. Domestic problems of a state present risks for the external environment, just as global issues influence the individuality of states<sup>22</sup>. The lesson of cohesion and the importance of alliances in times of prosperity as well as in times of major crises is one important takeaway with regards to the dynamics of global interdependencies.

States must be aware of the fact that the meaning of the notion of power, that they have gotten used to, has changed, and globalization compels them to reconceptualize the meaning of the notion of power<sup>23</sup>. Since weapons have been replaced with new types of attacks, atypical and asymmetrical, states are compelled to contemplate global strategies covering domains that are most important and vulnerable.

Provided that a few years ago interdependencies between states were perceived strictly through the prism of economic bonds<sup>24</sup>, with the passing of time and the

<sup>18</sup> John McCormick, *“Understanding the European Union: A Concise Introduction”*, New York, PALGRAVE, 2002, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission (2020), “The European Union. What it is and what it does”, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/>, Accessed on 10 May 2020.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> George Modelski, Tesseleno Devezas, William R. Thompson, *“Globalization as Evolutionary Process: Modelling Global Change”*, Routledge, 2007, pp. 381-399.

<sup>22</sup> Vasile Popa, *“Implicațiile globalizării asupra securității naționale”*, [The implications of globalization on national security], București, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Sean Kay, *“Globalization, Power, and Security”*, in SAGE Publications (Vol. 35(1): 9–25), Ohio, 2004 *apud* Kugler, Richard L. & Ellen L. Frost, *“The Global Century: Globalization and National Security”*, Volume I and II. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Vasile Pușcaș, *“Managing global interdependencies”*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2010, p. 79.

evolution of international relations, global interdependencies surpassed the economic and financial spheres<sup>25</sup>, nowadays including elements which concern the security of health, energetic security, food security, migration, thus helping states become conscious of the importance of uniting forces towards finding solutions to common problems<sup>26</sup>. As such, the actors involved in managing global interdependencies must exhibit a sense of professionalism, a will to cooperate and strategic management in decision-making<sup>27</sup>.

We thereby observe that state interdependencies, which developed in the same time with the ample process of globalization. According to how each state reacts to these changes, interactions must be catalogued as being beneficial or destructive<sup>28</sup>. There is a need for a new generation of partnerships with third countries – governed by new global norms, strengthening cooperation through digital platforms. Relations must take on a new form, that of inclusive multilateralism involving the private sector and the civil society<sup>29</sup>.

We therefore observe that interdependencies come with a series of benefits but also with long-term costs, costs that lead to vulnerabilities. Domestic and foreign policy are in a strong relationship of interdependence and in these tense moments, we must take advantage of the opportunity<sup>30</sup>. The management of interdependencies involves confronting global imbalances in order to find balance<sup>31</sup>.

Climate change, globalization and the increasing flow of travel have caused the spread of diseases, which in the past had a limited territorial spread, to extend rapidly throughout the globe<sup>32</sup>. Also, in the current pandemic context, we saw that the notion of security will not be seen strictly through a military perspective, it will embed elements of the sanitary, economic, cybernetic and food sectors as well, proving once again the need for an interdependent approach in crisis management.

By looking at the competences of the European Union in solving the pandemic, health policy perspective, we start the contextual analysis beginning from the competences of the Union in the field of health policies. By consulting the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, we find division of labour inside the Union, with regards to intergovernmental competences and communitarian ones<sup>33</sup>.

The Union's competences are divided into three categories, depending on the power of interference they can exercise over a specific area. We speak of exclusive competences in the areas where the Union acts alone, on behalf of the states, the shared competences of the Union being those in which the Union can establish a common policy without however preventing the states from exercising their own competences

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<sup>25</sup> George Modelski, Tesselano Devezas, William R. Thomson, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen J. Flanagan, Ellen L. Frost, Richard L. Kugler, "Challenges of the Global Century Report of the Project on Globalization and National Security", Institute for National Strategic Studies National Defense University Washington, 2001, pp. 7-14.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, "A renewed multilateralism fit for the 21st century: the EU's agenda", Brussels, 17.02.2021, Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_622](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_622), Accessed on 05 March 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Vasile Pușcaș, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Bradley J. Condon, Tapen Sinha, "Global Lessons from the AIDS Pandemic. Economic, Financial, Legal and Political Implications", Springer Ed., 2008, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> EUR-Lex, 12012E/TXT. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>, Accessed on 04 April 2020



in the areas where it has not legislated and nor is it going to do it<sup>34</sup>. The last category of competences specified in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union refers to the support competences, which touch upon the areas where the Union offers only opinions, helping to coordinate and supplement the actions of the states, which have the responsibility to legislate<sup>35</sup>.

According to Articles 114 and 16 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, actions of the Union seek filling the gaps of national policies in healthcare, supporting and encouraging the cooperation between Member States and non-member ones in the area of public health. Thus, the European Parliament, together with the Council, adopted measures with the purpose of encouraging the creation of a modern and efficient infrastructure in healthcare. The Commission also assists states in reforming national health systems by providing recommendations, analysis and forecasts based on official data.

The European Union is considering creating a health policy to improve the efficiency of health systems, increase accessibility to health services and improve resilience. At the World Health Summit held in October 2020, EC President Ursula von der Leyen<sup>36</sup> spoke about the importance of coordination between states, common measures, the need to implement international principles and commitments. Its own biomedical research agency can be the beginning for a stronger European Health Union.

In the field of public health, the European Union has the capacity to support states in overcoming the challenges. The Union pays greater attention to the health of citizens, which is why, under its charge, two agencies (the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the European Medicines Agency) function in the assessment and monitoring of threats to the health and quality management of medicines in the Union.

Since 2005, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has a role in strengthening Europe's protection against infectious diseases. This centre has six priorities: centralization of data provided by 27 EU countries on diseases and communicable diseases, provide states and EU institutions with scientific advice, help states to manage and be prepared for a pandemic, holds annual conferences for European scientists on the epidemiology of communicable diseases, coordinates the European Training Program in the field of intervention epidemiology and the European Training Program in the field of microbiology applied in public health<sup>37</sup>.

We therefore conclude that in the field of public health, the states have the responsibility of national management regarding the ongoing pandemic situation, in order to protect the health of their own citizens, while having the option to receive advice from the European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control, based on the data provided.

The problem that Europe, and likewise the whole world is facing, is a public health problem, which requires public policies for prevention and effective response.

<sup>34</sup> Dragos Chilea, "Partajul competențelor în Uniunea Europeană", [Sharing of competences in the European Union], Available at [http://revcurentjur.ro/old/arhiva/attachments\\_200434/recjurid043\\_44F.pdf](http://revcurentjur.ro/old/arhiva/attachments_200434/recjurid043_44F.pdf), Accessed on 04 April 2020.

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/what-european-commission-does/law/areas-eu-action\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/what-european-commission-does/law/areas-eu-action_en), Accessed on 04 April 2020.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_20\\_1983](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_1983), Accessed on 05 February 2021.

<sup>37</sup> European Union, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/agencies/ecdc\\_ro#ce-face](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/agencies/ecdc_ro#ce-face), Accessed on 05 April 2020.

This problem represents a major threat to security, the economy, political stability and to human rights as well<sup>38</sup>.

The issues concerning the health of the citizens of the Union were discussed and analysed at European level. Given the importance of this chapter and the diversity of approaches found in the Member States with regard to this chapter, it has been established that the Union encourages cooperation between Member States in the field of health and supports public health actions but does not encourage harmonization of public health measures in the Member States. In view of the latest crises we mention swine fever, genetically modified crops, MERS, dioxin<sup>39</sup> and more recently COVID-19 crisis, we consider that it is a realistic expectation now more than before the pandemic, that health policy will have to become a common policy, because the citizens of the Union are now waiting, more than ever, for a stronger response during health crises.

In the actual pandemic context, the interdependence of security is manifested in the sanitary security of food as well. Developed commerce and tourism can be seen as factors of international propagation of this pandemic. From this point of view, it is important that states are conscious of the fact that food security is a common responsibility and collaboration among them can make the fight against this type of new threat (pandemic) more efficient.

It was mentioned earlier that an important component of the security nexus is the economic dimension. The concept of economic security defines the state of economy in the conditions of economic sovereignty and a favourable competitive environment, which offers the possibility of growth and durable development of the economy. Economic security ensures the protection of economic interests of states in cases of internal or external threats that are pointed against the integrity of the economic environment<sup>40</sup>.

Even if not long ago energy security was an area perceived as pertaining strictly to the national competence of the state, now it is beginning to feature more frequently in international negotiations that take place. Because of the large number of state and non-state actors involved in energy policies, the European Commission was not able to accomplish an energy policy of perspective, states always choosing to solve these types of issues on their own. In these moments in which the future of Europe takes shape and is rewritten it is important that the energy chapter is not abandoned but embedded in the next global strategy<sup>41</sup>.

In relation to the interdependencies manifested in the field of digitalization, we must mention the major impact that digitalization has had on the economic, educational and cultural field. Societies evolve by meeting unprecedented challenges in their evolution. Digital technologies must come and strengthen the goals of sustainable development by covering existing gaps and encouraging the intensification of digital

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<sup>38</sup> Terrence M. O'Sullivan, *"Disease, death and disruption: globalization, bioterrorism and the Dorian politics of catastrophic infectious disease outbreaks"*, University of Southern California, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ben Duncan, "Health policy in the European Union: how it's made and how to influence it", Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1122958/>, Accessed on April 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Doriană Fornea, Bestenigar Kara, Traian Coltea, "Despre categoria "securitatea economică" în literatura economică mondială", [On "economic security" in the world economic literature] in *Revista Militară*. [Military Journal] no. 2 (14) / 2015, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> European Commission (2021), "Landscape of subnational and non-state climate action in the EU: what science tells us today", Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/landscape-subnational-and-non-state-climate-action-eu-what-science-tells-us-today\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/landscape-subnational-and-non-state-climate-action-eu-what-science-tells-us-today_en), Accessed on 05 March 2021.

cooperation. Strengthening interdependencies implies better cooperation between governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector, driven by a spirit of cooperation and inclusiveness<sup>42</sup>.

The pressure that the representatives of each state feel is different depending on the degree of development of the country and the speed with which it can respond to public health problems.

We would like to end this section of our paper by providing answers to the questions presented at the beginning of the article. One of our concerns was how did the pandemic find the European Union. We will conclude by taking a look at the actions taken by the actors involved in managing this pandemic, stating that the European Union was taken by surprise and the lack of leadership was initially felt, affected all areas, weakening confidence in the power and coherence of the Union. Institutional actors did not seem to have learned and had not transferred their lessons from previous crises. However, the actions that followed were meant to provide clarity in approach and the desire to succeed.

After analysing the responses of Member States, we saw that although they initially channelled their attention to their own problems without seeing the bigger picture, limiting themselves to managing the situation within their own borders, they quickly realized that the power of interdependence, felt in all areas, has no territorial limits and global problems can only be solved through genuine cooperation.

Answering the third question that followed the identification of interdependencies manifested at the level of the European Union during the first year of the pandemic, we emphasize that these, as we saw, manifested in many areas from political, economic, social, sanitary and cultural. The importance of interdependencies cannot go unnoticed and its effects are major.

### **Conclusions**

We live a tense period both internally and externally, at European and global level, a difficult period, full of incertitude, obstacles and adversities, and it became obvious that the EU economy will experience a recession of historical proportions in 2020 and the socio-economic impact will be felt for years to come. Together with the public health crisis sparked by the outbreak, the economic impact was immediately felt, and the gaps in the political environment did not take long to reveal themselves. It is true that the pandemic took Europe by surprise, finding it in an acute lack of leadership, as if surprised by the power of interdependencies, showing a lack of global solidarity, blaming other countries for their own predicament<sup>43</sup>. In these difficult times, Europe must be aware of the importance of interconnectivity, to react with global solidarity and with the desire for a more resilient, digital, ecological and strongly interconnected Europe.

The global COVID crisis must be seen as an opportunity to relaunch Europe and not as a tragedy in the history of the XXI century. The European Union has been in a stalemate for several years, struggling with successive crises. And the reasons for this stalemate are well known: the migrant crisis, Brexit, the rise of terrorist groups, the

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<sup>42</sup> United Nations, "The age of digital interdependence", Available at <https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf>, Accessed on 19 March 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Yuval Noah Harari (2020), Interviewed by Anna Carthaus for DW, 22.04.2020, Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/virus-itself-is-not-the-biggest-danger-says-yuval-noah-harari/a-53195552>, Accessed on 15 February 2021.

conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, cyber terrorism and informational warfare and, more recently, the COVID 19 pandemic and its associated ‘infodemic’. All these crises have highlighted the importance of a unified and prompt response in difficult times.

The pandemic crisis must be seen as an opportunity for economic recovery and because Europe’s future is shaping up with the decisions taken now, we must take advantage of all the mechanisms at the Union’s disposal to reconfigure the Union from the ground up. We need a new mentality, a new style of leadership, integrated solutions and operational models for European institutions capable of generating quick solutions<sup>44</sup>.

We live in an era of connectivity and interdependencies manifested in all areas and it is in the power of current leaders to model, implement and develop strategies and mechanisms for a new Europe. In a world of globalization, Europe can be shaped, transformed and rediscovered time and again<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Melania-Gabriela Ciot, “European decision making model in pandemic crisis”, in Melania-Gabriela Ciot (ed.), *Searching for decision making models in international politics*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> European Parliament, Address by Angela Merkel to the European Parliament, [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/plenary-session\\_20200708-0900-PLenary\\_vd?start=20200708121000&end=20200708141835](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/plenary-session_20200708-0900-PLenary_vd?start=20200708121000&end=20200708141835), Accessed on 10 February 2021.

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