The Irish poet W.B Yeats writing in the aftermath of revolution wrote “All changed, utterly changed: a terrible beauty is born”. Events sudden and profound changed all and everything: “He too has been changed in his turn. Transformed utterly: A terrible beauty is born”.

Covid-19 is unlike anything the world has faced since the Second World War and will have implications for every nation, economy and citizen. We must plan therefore for a changed future - not a return to an unsustainable past. Climate change was already changing the policy choices – but slowly and incrementally – our rebuild, reboot must now be profound and new.

In a few short months we have relearned that science matters, that experts need to be listened to, and ignorance has a real and painful cost. We have learned that we can travel less, embrace technology more and that to overcome challenges we need coordination and cooperation.

The coronavirus is blind to borders, races, genders or status. Although our capacity to fight back is differentiated.

So what’s next - where do we go from here?
Some changes are already made. More people will work from home permanently - governments are already imposing tax incentives to do so. Worker’s productivity will be measured differently, not by hours on the job but by tasks completed. Access to technology will be crucial. Robotisation and mechanisation will greatly accelerate. There will be greater focus on health preparedness and national or regional health self-sufficiency.

“If we are to learn anything from the crisis, it should be that we shift the emphasis from armaments and from the debt we are encouraging in the world, to providing universal basic services.”
President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, During the AEPI web conference ‘Responding to COVID-19: The Situation in Africa.’

www.aepi-international.org
There will be greater risk of inequality. Unequal access to technology, to pharmaceutical research and innovation, to investment capital, as massive sums are deployed to restart Northern hemisphere economies. International tourism will take years to fully recover.

These inequalities, if unaddressed, will lead to further poverty and migration pressures, potentially fuelling popular nationalism in developed countries.

So what role is there for an organisation of European and African Parliamentarians to make a difference?

Make a Case for Investment

In 1944 The Bretton Woods Conference created the World Bank in recognition of the urgent need for investment to rebuild a devastated Europe after the World War. This role was eclipsed in 1948 when the European Recovery Programme (The Marshall Plan) saw the transfer of $12bn (equivalent of $128 billion today) to West European economies.

The source of the money, the U.S., understood that its own security and economic wellbeing required Europe to be rebuilt and restored in economic strength.

We are now entering another period of history when the economic wellbeing and health of all nations are mutually interdependent. While massive capital will be deployed in the developed world, access to unprecedented capital investment and social investment equally must be made available to developing nations. Not on the basis of creating crippling debt which has been sometimes the pattern of the past, but on the European concept of cohesion to bring economies and peoples to a level of sustainable development capable of caring and nurturing for their people.

Make a case for the sharing of vital intellectual property (including formulas for essential medicines and vaccines) and technologies

Coronavirus may be the first of several global viral pandemics. It is clear that this virus can only be defeated when it is defeated everywhere. When a vaccine is developed it must be the intellectual property of humankind. The same must be true to treatments of all infectious disease. Partnerships in technology also need to be developed to ensure that every nation is included in technological innovation particularly in relation to transformative “green” technologies.

Advocacy for Tax Justice

Build on the growing public demand to ensure that the large corporations pay tax on a fair and transparent basis. Much positive work has been done by The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) proposals that impact on transparency of taxation in developed (OECD) countries. The work needs to include developing countries too.
Strengthening Democracies

The core strength of an organisation like AEPI is its membership of parliamentarians. Our work has always had two components - campaigning for Africa in Europe and partnering with African colleagues to build robust democratic institutions. It can be argued that the need to campaign for Africa in a Europe becoming more nationalistic, more insular, has never been greater.

The strengthening of democratic institutions in Africa requires particularly the capacity of parliaments to make Executives accountable; this remains our principal task and the role that we are best suited to fulfil.

There are many NGO's and state agencies involved in development work. Our task is not to compete with them or to try to do things they already do well. The collective experience, skillset and reach of parliamentarians from many countries and political traditions makes us unique. We can define our unique role and develop our membership and potential to deliver.

Web Conferences

Over the last few months AEPI has inaugurated a series of Web Conferences which have addressed the global COVID-19 pandemic and its range of effects. Among the contributors to our first events have been H.E. Michael Higgins, President of Ireland, Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS and UN Under-Secretary General, Martha Karua, Presidential candidate and former Minister in Kenya, Odette Nyiramilimo, Rwandan Physician and Senator, Dr. Ouma Oluga, Chief Officer of Health at the Nairobi Metropolitan Service, Kenya and Saul Walker, Deputy Director, DFID UK, COVID-19 Vaccines, Therapeutics and Diagnostics Strategy.

Should you have missed one, do please go to our website www.aepi-international.org where you will find them.

We intend to continue developing our Web Conferences along these lines featuring high-level panellists from across the world. One upcoming will be around the theme of the future of global trade post-Covid-19 where we will partner with the University of Nairobi and Atiya Waris, Professor and Writer, who will be one of the panellists along with Mr. Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Trade and currently candidate for the Director General of the WTO.

Our next Web Conference will be on the subject of youth in Africa and its title will be “Being Young in Africa,” embracing the topics of health, employment, representation and equality.

If you would like to be added to the list of future web conferences please send an email to info@aepi-international.org. As lockdown is lifting, so slowly conversations resume with partners and donors.

“There is no panacea to the COVID-19 pandemic, but solidarity will be the best medicine.”

Former Minister for Justice in Kenya and AEPI Advisory Board member, Martha Karua, during the AEPI web conference ‘Responding to COVID-19: The Situation in Africa’.

“With a COVID-19 Vaccine be Available North and South?”

LIVE Webcast
An African-European Parliamentarians Initiative (AEPI) Event

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