

More mysteries

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Slowly the summer is coming to an end. In Northwestern Europe heat and drought, the latter now in its third consecutive year, seem to have become endemic. Not just forests, also people are dying. Does anyone believe that Frau von der Leyen's "Green Deal" will make a difference? Angela Merkel, world champion of symbolic politics — her favorite praise of a political move is calling it "a strong signal" — has scheduled a private meeting with Greta Thunberg, whom we remember from the long-gone era BC, Before Corona. What will Angela learn from Greta that her staff has not already told her, or the climate scientists at the universities?

Sometimes during these mind-numbing summer days we remember the Corona "recovery" project adopted a few long weeks ago in Brussels. The more we do so, the more mysterious that project looks. What has in fact been decided? It seems that the money will not flow before 2022; by then the European economy may have started to grow again. No "European solidarity" in the meantime? In 2022 the program may be procyclical, causing capacity shortages and fanning inflation in the sectors where the EU money will be spent. Nor do we really know how that money will be allocated, above and beyond the already fixed national quotas. How much discretion will receiving countries in fact have? We hear states will have to submit project applications to be vetted by someone in Brussels – the Commission, the Council, or both. Who will be the experts that will review the proposals? Who will reject projects that do not fit the program, or ask for amendments? How much time will this (be allowed to) take? We also remember the considerable sums from the Structural Funds that are year by year left sitting in Brussels accounts although they have been properly awarded, because countries do not have the resources to administer them, or planning takes longer than

expected, or courts intervene to enforce national regulations, or work must be tendered Europe-wide, etc. etc.

Indeed, come to think of it, what does the fight against Corona have to do with digitization and decarbonization, the two main declared purposes of the “recovery fund”? One hears, for example, that the Italian government plans to use a goodly share of its allocation for the construction of fast railway lines, so that all Italians can reach Rome, provided they want to, in at most four-and-a-half hours. How is this supposed to protect Italians from infection, or from dying in an underfunded hospital? In Germany planning and building a railway track like this takes at least a decade. How much faster can it be done in Italy? And who will provide the trains? Siemens, Alstom, or the two together?

Meanwhile the second Corona wave seems to be building. Apparently it is not easy to say how exactly the virus distributes its favors; this, clearly, is yet another mystery. One thing that the virus has taught us is how dangerously dependent the economies of some European countries have become on Northern European tourists, in particular from Germany and Britain — on allowing them to get drunk on their beaches, upon which they return to their native countries to become what are now called superspreaders. Among other things, this results in painful international disputes on whether Northern countries can legitimately issue travel warnings for fellow EU member states, and whether Southern countries can be expected to incur potentially crippling economic losses by truthfully reporting their infection rates. Virus or not, is it economically healthy if grown-up countries depend as vitally as some do on the so-called “tourism industry”? That the well-being of civilized nations has come to hinge on those unpleasant characters that let themselves be shipped around the world by airlines attracting them with slogans like “Get drunk in a different place”?

Finally, has anyone heard of Brussels using the holiday season to urge member countries to get prepared for the next Corona wave? To set up more testing places, hospital beds, depots for medical materials? To turn hospitals, nursing homes and senior residences into

safer places? After all, everybody knows that another lockdown would bring entire countries finally to their knees, even Germany, the first wave's big winner. The Swedish approach — taking targeted safety measures while allowing life, work, schools, universities to continue — could already now appear superior, had the Swedish government been aware of the devastations caused for the protection of patients and staff by its radical privatization of nursing homes in the past decade. Is anyone learning the lessons from this, now that there is still time? Where are the new regulations for the management of care institutions that will make it possible to avoid closing down and thereby wrecking whole national economies and societies?