

Bologna Institute for Policy Research

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Speaker: Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal

Chair: Michael G. Plummer, Director of SAIS Europe; Eni Professor of Economics of International Economics

Moderated by SAIS Students Representatives: Arianna Bondi, MAIA '20 (Italy) - Niklas Hintermayer, MA '21 (Austria) - Emma Slater, MA '21 (UK) - Zoe Strauss, MA '21 (The Netherlands)

“A Green Recovery: Which World Do We Want After Covid-19?”

As countries across Europe have closed down borders and implemented various forms of lockdowns to cope with the catastrophic spread of the coronavirus, Mr Timmermans joined SAIS students, alumni and guests to discuss what the pandemic means for the future of Europe. When this current European Commission took over, the climate crisis was at the top of European priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined almost everything, exposed our vulnerabilities but also showed the urgency to improve our relationship with the planet. Now Europe and the world will need to spend and invest significantly to recover from this crisis; Mr Timmermans argues that every euro spent supporting old, finite, fossil fuel-driven businesses is wasted in the long-term. We only have one chance to get it right. Thus, both public and private investment patterns need to show a shift in favour of green investments.

As our actions now regard the future, and also put an increasing debt burden on the next generations, it is vital that governments also have the support of the these young generations. Mr Timmermans argues this is an important time both to shift investment towards long-term green investments, but also to demonstrate to the public that populism, refutation of experts, and empty rhetoric do not work in governing and fighting real challenges. For continued public support towards a green recovery, it is also important to show concrete short-term results. Creating jobs and cutting household bills through refurbishing buildings for energy efficiency and updating transport sectors are just two examples of the potential for effective long-term investments that will also generate short-term results.

The rise of populism preceding the Covid-19 crisis has had dangerous implications for countries' varied responses. Certain regimes in Europe and across the world have limited the freedom of the media, undermining democracy and the rule of law. Mr Timmermans discusses the risks of 'majority rule' democracy that ignores minority interests and assumes the right to control all areas of society, from the rule of law to the media. It encourages a zero-sum game in democracy where the winner takes all.. However, democracy is just as much about minorities as majorities, for the minority of today could be the majority of tomorrow. Moreover, apart from the moral imperative, an ineffective rule of law is also vital for investment and economic recovery.

We are living in an age of unprecedented insecurity; through a global recession, the fourth industrial revolution, an existential climate crisis, and now the most destructive pandemic for generations. This insecurity now extends to our lives spent increasingly online and progressively less private. However, Mr Timmermans reminds us that already GDPR has gone from heavy criticism to being considered just the first step in protecting citizens online. Therefore, he concludes by arguing, if we can adjust our post Covid-19 economies to consider data and nature along with traditional labour and capital, we can generate sustainable, responsible and inclusive growth.

A recording of the seminar can be watched [here](#)