Towards a
European Foundation for the Prevention
of Environmental and Health Crises
We are going through an unprecedented and unanticipated crisis, but not entirely unexpected, as the possibility of pandemics has been discussed for several years. Other major crises are looming, whether pandemics, panzootics, climate change related disasters, geological events with a global impact...

We need to prepare for the next big bad.

This is true globally, but at a time when China and the United States each seek to impose their respective political and social views, we must preserve the common ground that prevails in Europe, one that makes the majority of its citizens proud: based in social solidarity, political democracy and concern for the public good.

It is the primary responsibility of national governments and of the European Union. But this institutional response is not sufficient. The civil society has a role to play. A European Foundation, funded by high-net worth individuals, could bring about much swifter responses to unexpected challenges.

This booklet presents the concept, as it has been put forward by a group of 77 scientists (see list p. 27) from all over Europe in June of 2020.

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I. The Covid-19 crisis: a wake-up call for a disruptive initiative

A. History

The global health crisis is still with us. The first clear signs appeared at the end of December 2019 in China, where an apparently new disease was rapidly spreading in the Wuhan region; within a few days, Chinese biologists had established that the disease was caused by a new coronavirus (eventually named SARS-Cov-2), and the DNA sequence of the virus was made public.

During January 2020, it slowly became clear that the disease could be deadly, and that it could be transmitted by human-to-human contact. The World Health Organisation monitored the crisis very closely, convening an Emergency Committee, which led to the declaration of a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020. By that time, several countries were experiencing their first cases. Although the WHO, hindered by political considerations, would not officially declare a pandemic until March 11, the organisation was very active during the month of February to provide recommendations to governments on fighting the disease.

As is well known, the epidemic entered its first exponential growth phase during the month of February. Italy and Spain were the first European countries experiencing a massive impact with dire consequences. But most governments did not take any significant measure before early March.
B. Europe divided, paralysed, and bouncing back

European countries were all affected, but with varying degrees. With least-affected countries acting selfishly and showing very little coordination, the European Union was unable to develop a specific vision and means of action compatible with its democratic values, nor able to trigger immediate mechanisms of intra-European solidarity and to deploy efficient tools to fight the disease. The fact that Italy obtained significant aid from China, by massive shipments of masks and other equipment, was a painful eye-opener. At the beginning of the summer, the decision to create a European recovery fund and to mutualise the debt was a powerful and much needed demonstration of solidarity.

Since the fall of 2020, Europe has been undergoing a second viral wave, forcing most of the European countries to lock down again. In one year since the epidemic started, over 500,000 EU citizens passed away from Covid-19. The Union’s response has been mixed, with good aspects, as setting up the conditions for the transfer of Covid-19 patients from regions with an acute outbreak to other hospitals in Europe, or negotiating collectively with pharmaceutical companies for the centralised purchase of vaccines in order to organise an equitable distribution of vaccine doses among EU countries. On the other hand, the EU was not well prepared to manage such huge contract with the proper balance between keeping the price down, insuring legal protection against possible side-effects, and procuring sufficient quantities quickly. Moreover, there has been little anticipation and coordination between European governments, despite the fact that the second wave had been predicted by most epidemiologists as early as July 2020.
Overall, the Covid-19 crisis engendered at the same time a general reaction of withdrawal (my family, my region, my country, my line of activity...) and a desperate need for a dramatically increased level of solidarity.

C. What happened at the level of research

European responses to the various epidemics that have affected the planet over the past 15 years have been somewhat chaotic. Crisis management requires coordination (at the national, European and international level). Its success requires delving into past knowledge. The more pre-existing knowledge, the higher the probability of producing positive results in the short run.

Scientists had not waited for the 2003 outbreak of SARS-CoV-1\(^1\), a close relative to the 2019 SARS-CoV-2, to investigate coronaviruses. These had been known since the 1950s and had revealed a number of their secrets in the 1990s thanks to the advances of molecular biology.

When the 2003 SARS crisis occurred, Europe was reactive: calls were launched to the scientific community, with €100 million invested in vaccine development. But the virus vanished on its own within six months and the epidemic died out. Nevertheless, Europe announced the funding of major research programmes to avoid being caught off-guard in the event of future viral epidemics. Unfortunately, the interest of politicians for SARS-CoV-1 declined as rapidly as the virus

\(^1\) The **Severe acute respiratory syndrome** outbreak in 2003 had a very high fatality rate (over 10%); fortunately it had a minor impact, and never spread significantly outside of the Far East.
disappeared. These ambitious programmes were discontinued.

Yet, Europe gained experience from the SARS-2003 and MERS-2012\(^2\) crises regarding clinical research (i.e., research conducted on humans with a view to improving human health: knowledge of diseases, development of treatments and diagnostic methods based on observational studies — cohorts, epidemiology— and intervention studies or clinical trials). European networks of clinicians and epidemiologists were organised and funded to be prepared for the next epidemic crisis.

With the advent of SARS-CoV-2, Europe launched in March 2020 an action plan based on coordinated work with national institutions. The aim was to support 18 projects to the tune of €48 million to develop diagnostic tests, treatments and vaccines. However, during March-April 2020, we actually saw a rather different scenario unfold. There was a series of conflicting actions between Member States without European coordination, an absence of solidarity with the most affected European territories, a multitude of clinical trials launched without prior consultation. In addition, the divergent rules for clinical trials that prevailed among the Member States added to the failure of European initiatives. In short, everything for which the previous European actions had been launched disappeared in the turmoil despite the goodwill of researchers and clinicians whose pre-existing coordination was shattered by uncoordinated State decisions.

\(^2\) The Middle East respiratory syndrome, also caused by a Coronavirus, was first diagnosed in Humans in 2012.
Based on this critical evaluation of the response to the tragedy that Europe experienced, a group of seventy-six prominent scientists from fifteen European countries, revisited what should be an appropriate response, not on the short term – how to deal with this crisis – but on the long term – how to deal with future crises. Other dramatic events, which could be either directly health-related as this one, or environmental, will occur. Vital crops could be impacted by diseases or sudden climate change. In all of these cases, the effect on human health could be severe. In addition to improving governmental responses, as well as an increased synergy at the European Union level, there is a need for a better participation of European citizens, including the wealthiest, to properly face future crises. Hence a call was launched for the creation of a European Foundation for the Prevention of Environmental and Health Crises. The call was given a large audience by the scientific journal Nature, then published and commented by several prominent newspapers and media in Europe. It is included, along with the list of signatories, as an Annex to this document.
II. What is the Foundation about?

A. Vision and Missions

There will be other pandemics and epizooties. There will be major disasters stemming from climate change. We do not know when or how. But we know that, now, the appropriate tools are lacking to anticipate and cope with such crises. Building up efficient tools is a core mission of this Foundation.

The Foundation seeks to much better prepare citizens and territories for the next big bad in order to significantly reduce the destructive effects of these catastrophes on society.

The Foundation will focus on pandemics and environmental threats, whose devastating effects on societies are huge and sudden. Some of these threats are already known in part while others are not.

The Foundation will foster research aimed at crisis anticipation and contribute to the identification of targeted actions to limit the negative impacts of these catastrophes. Thus, the Foundation will not offer a new niche to support “curiosity-driven” research nor will it support “applied science” projects per se. There are many institutions, at both national and European levels, that aim at such a support.

The Foundation will support action-research with the following goals:

- identifying the coming big threats and anticipating their destructive effects along the following dimensions: biological, social, economic and environmental;
- identifying territories that could be most badly impacted and assess their level of preparedness;
- defining prevention programs including early signalling systems;
- running drills.

A great deal of this action-research will be driven by a multidisciplinary approach, involving basic science, applied science, technology, engineering as well as human, social, political, environmental, economic sciences. Developing partnership with local territories and authorities is part of the effort.

B. Why anticipating both global warming and health crises?

It is now well understood that global warming will have a major impact on the environment in the next fifty years. Contrary to the emergence of a virus, global warming is a slow process but it can also trigger dramatic events: storms, hurricanes, floods, droughts, forest fires...

Environmental and health crises put the world at risk with a broad range of threats to public health – from infectious disease outbreaks, unsafe water and technological hazards to extreme weather events. While their origins vary, these hazards bear the potential to cause significant harm and their consequences are similar: the health of millions of people is endangered. Thus, despite the high diversity of threats to public health worldwide, preparedness should be built as a common goal.

a. Environmental and health crises are both greatly unpredictable but their probability of occurrence is increasing: the incidence of natural disasters has been steadily increasing with climate change, which parallels the
outbreak of viral epidemics that we have faced in the past twenty years.

b. Environmental and health crises result in significant impacts on the lives and health of millions of people, with absolutely no regards for borders. They are both threatening humankind with devastating effects on human lives and people’s health, but also indirect threats to their social lives and welfare, through the disruption of health systems, social services and economic activities.

c. Environmental and health crises endanger any system that has underlying vulnerability everywhere in the world. The vulnerability to emergencies is determined by the inability to anticipate, respond to, and recover from environmental and health crises. The burden of these crises falls disproportionately on the more underprivileged, vulnerable populations.

d. Inaction and its human, social and economic costs, both in the short-term and in the long-run, far outstrip the costs of action. While different crises call for different responses, common preparation structures are needed to centralize efforts and build capacities to face any emerging crisis.
Getting ready for the next big bad

Giving priority to human life and solidarity while preserving economic, social and cultural organisations
### C. Examples of threats and potential future crises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infectious disease outbreaks</strong></td>
<td>Human diseases, zoonotic diseases, insect-borne diseases…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Failure of a major crop and food insecurity</strong></td>
<td>Due to plant diseases or destructive insect invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panzootics</strong></td>
<td>Affecting in particular our food supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water and sanitation crisis</strong></td>
<td>Water contamination, freshwater shortages</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extreme weather event</strong></td>
<td>Storms, hurricanes, flooding, droughts, wildfires, extreme temperatures and other climate change related events…</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extreme geological event</strong></td>
<td>Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions…</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extreme astronomical event</strong></td>
<td>Asteroid collision on earth, magnetic storms, solar storms…</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collapse of an ecosystem and loss of biodiversity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chemical pollution of air, soils and oceans</strong></td>
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III. Why a foundation, why a European foundation?

As exposed above, a call was issued in June 2020 to create the European Foundation for the Prevention of Environmental and Health Crises. Explaining this bold initiative is necessary.

A. Why a private foundation?

The signatories of the call strongly believe in the importance of governments and public institutions. We strongly believe that the European Union is crucial for the future of Europe, and that it must play a prominent role in initiating and coordinating actions against health and environmental crises. However, we also understand that national governments develop, by essence, a vision which is focused on their country. Furthermore, each Member State has its own political agenda that may interfere with the logic of a crisis-driven emergency policy. This sums up as a heavy burden for any decision-making policy at the EU level. The Foundation would not be caught into these political constraints because of its clear focus on research aimed at anticipating crises and of its role restricted to emergency responses at the outbreak of a crisis. Neither the current governmental bodies (national organisations and foundations, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, World Health Organization...), nor the NGOs (Médecins sans frontières...) or other foundations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Wellcome Trust...) do combine these skills.

In summary, because the European Union needs to follow strict rules of co-decision with national governments, its capacity to act quickly is hindered. In such circumstances, an
extra-governmental body, for instance a European-wide foundation would fill a void by providing the most appropriate and complementary tools to anticipate and respond quickly to an emerging crisis.

B. Why a foundation at the European level?

The health and environmental crises are global crises which require global policies. Each European country cannot implement actions at the appropriate level. What is true of governments is also true of private organisations in Europe. They are too small to be effective when facing a major health or environmental crisis. Except for the Wellcome Trust, there is no very large foundation in Europe, with an endowment of over 10Bn€. Interestingly, the Wellcome Trust, whose focus is the funding of research in the life sciences, has indicated an intention to broaden its focus.

The scientists who initiated the call experienced the gap between the density of international collaboration between research laboratories —further increased by the emergency in fighting against the virus— and the lack of concerted action and solidarity between European States in spring 2020. It is a major concern for our European societies that the lack of coordination between European countries when fighting the pandemics would have generated distrust between the people and their political leaders. This distrust may compromise the future of political democracy and social solidarity, which form the common ground for the European Nations.

The EU has demonstrated its capacity to act powerfully in financial terms to respond to the major side-effects of the
pandemics on the European economy. Thus, one can expect that long-term and mid-term responses can be devised by the EU to face the consequences of a health or environmental crisis. However, for their proper anticipation and rapid response before an outbreak, a complementary initiative at the European level from a clearly focused private foundation would highly benefit the European countries while reaffirming Europe’s involvement in worldwide humanitarian crisis response and risk management of environmental and health crises.

IV. Governance

Although details will depend on the national/regional laws where the Foundation is based, it should obey the following general principles. The Foundation will be led by a Board of Directors (BoD) and it will be managed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), coordinating the staff of the Foundation. There will be a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and a Project Nominating Committee (PNC).

i. The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors includes the funders or their representatives on one hand, and independent directors selected for their personality and skills and the other hand.

The Board of Directors, led by the President of the Foundation, is responsible for overall administration and oversight. It is the decision-making body. The Board of Directors validates the strategy proposed by the CEO as well as the budget and the rules regarding acceptance of funds.
The Board of Directors appoints and dismisses the CEO. The board validates the annual legal Reports.

The Board delegates the day-to-day responsibility for the running of the Foundation to the CEO. It approves and adopts a Conflicts of Interest Policy and Code of Conduct.

ii. The CEO and the Management Committee

The CEO is salaried. He/She manages the Foundation and recruits the staff. The CEO attends the meetings of the Board of Directors. The CEO works directly with a Management Committee. They review and make decisions on key operational matters on behalf of the Board of Directors. They accompany the progress of the projects, their evaluation, the reaction to blockages, the support of additional contributions if needed, all actions which require a regular monitoring of the projects. This monitoring task can be the object of paid work.

iii. The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

The SAC covers specific areas of expertise each designed to support the Foundation’s key strategic themes. The SAC is available for advice to the board and provides tailored, expert support and advice to the CEO, in particular for building up the scientific strategy and identify the research programs of the Foundation.
iv. The Project Nominating Committee (PNC)

Because the Foundation will foster research aimed at crisis anticipation and contribute to the identification of targeted actions to limit the negative impact of these catastrophes, it will use a *modus operandi* aimed at selecting contributors committed to action-research projects. For this Foundation, the Project Nominating Committee, whose members should have expertise in crisis-related issues, will carefully identify all over Europe those laboratories, institutions and companies, which possess the knowledge, skills and expertise to be eligible to the various action-research programs defined by the Scientific Advisory Committee and the CEO/Management Committee. Each programme will be broken down in a series of projects, for which the PNC has the authority to identify and nominate individuals or structures capable of implementing one of these projects. Whenever feasible, a competitive evaluation of at least three proposals per project will be performed by *ad hoc* reviewers nominated by the PNC.
V. Pending questions: Legal aspects for a pan-European foundation

Presently there is no legal framework for a European foundation. Only national foundations exist.

The State of European philanthropy

According to Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe (DAFNE), there are some 148,000 European foundations, with expenditure of nearly €17bn in 2014. Germany has the largest foundation sector, both in terms of numbers (over 20,000) and expenditure (€6bn in 2012). Six other European countries have at least 10,000 registered public benefit foundations with the second and third largest sectors, in terms of numbers, to be found in Poland and Hungary. European philanthropic capital is extremely concentrated, mainly as a result of some very large foundations as, in Germany, the Robert Bosch Foundation (endowment 5.5 Bn€) or, in the UK, the Wellcome Trust (endowment 25.9 Bn£).

The lack of legal framework for a European foundation

Starting in 2009, though, there was a push for such a framework. The framework would have been additional and complementary to existing national legislations. A European foundation would have been legally recognized in all European Union member States and would have operated under the same set of conditions across the European Union.

The Commission initiated a European-wide consultation. The results were mixed: there was a strong support for a European foundation Status from the non-profit sector whereas the few respondent public authorities as well as
most of the few respondent business associations were sceptical or negative towards the idea of such a statute. Many issues were raised on the tax status, the legal status, etc.

Nonetheless, on February 8, 2012, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a new legislation (Regulation) on a European foundation Status. Proponents of a European foundation Status pointed out that foundations and their funders are increasingly working across borders, but that a number of legal and administrative barriers are hampering new foundation initiatives in Europe and the current work of existing foundations. The statute was proposed to offer an appropriate legal tool to perform and increase foundations work and operations across Europe, while reducing costly administrative burden.

The European Parliament voted in favour of the proposal on July 2, 2013, but the European Council never agreed on the proposal, leading to the withdrawal in 2015 of the Commission’s legislative proposal.

In our view, the present crisis provides a renewed incentive to create such a status. However, we should explore alternatives.

Alternatives

The immediate possibility would be to create a foundation based in one of the EU countries. The “Transnational Giving Europe” partnership, which connects major foundations throughout Europe, could be used as a mechanism to collect funds from all over Europe. Indeed, “Transnational Giving Europe” allows individual and corporate donors from 17 European countries to benefit from the tax reliefs in their
own country when supporting a public benefit organisation in one of the other 16 countries.

If, as a first step, the Foundation is established in one of the European countries, it should be chosen according to the following criteria:

- a favourable legal framework for foundations, insuring as much as possible tax exemptions
- the maximum flexibility to distribute funds in Europe and beyond.

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3 There are many different legal frameworks for foundations, according to different countries and within countries. Each comes with its advantages and shortcomings. Just to name a few: the French « fondation d’utilité publique » (which is hard to obtain, and requires a representative of the French State in its board). The German « Rechtsfähige Stiftung des bürger-lichen Rechts », the Italian « Fondazione », the Spanish « fundación » etc.
Appendix: the call and its impact
A. Text of the call (published on June 23rd, 2020)

The advent of SARS-COVID-2 has plunged the world into an unprecedented health crisis. The pandemic’s rapid, inevitable spread due to the countless individual journeys across our globalised planet stands in stark contrast to the difficulties experienced by governments that are trying to handle it --and whose management strategies seem to widely diverge. Even long-established geopolitical rivalries may have become all the more acute.

The pandemic arose just as we had been bracing ourselves, over the past several years now, for another major crisis: global warming. This will radically impact the habitability of low-lying areas; upend agriculture and our food supply; and very likely alter the mechanisms for the spread of infectious diseases. It is hard to anticipate all of the ensuing humanitarian crises and migrations.

At a time when China and the United States each seek to impose their respective political and social views, we must preserve the common ground that prevails in Europe, one that makes the majority of its citizens proud: based in social solidarity, political democracy and concern for the public good. As we know, social inequalities tend to arise in any crisis, with the most underprivileged groups and individuals generally being hurt worst of all. To deal with such challenges, we expect that European governments will assume their responsibilities; but the European Union needs to strengthen its crisis-management capacities to properly chart a course through chaotic circumstances toward more peaceful times. It must demonstrate its ability to coordinate aid towards the regions and populations that are most
severely impacted by health or environmental crises and that require a strong show of solidarity.

As the current pandemic serves to remind us, however, such institutional responses are hampered by complex administrations whose response time is ill-suited for major emergencies. The mobilisation of civil society must also, therefore, take place. Efforts by high-net-worth individuals could bring about much swifter responses to unexpected challenges, while usefully complementing those measures decreed by European States and the European Union.

In the United States the initiatives by American billionaires countering the pandemic are too many to list; and they pursue a philanthropic tradition that constitutes 1.95% of the US GDP. In Europe, where philanthropy is much less historically ingrained, there are indeed some notable efforts in education, in the sciences and on social welfare, but overall such gifts only total 0.65% of the GDP. Gestures to confront Covid-19 on the part of wealthy Europeans have been, to say the least, rare and far between.

Thus, we call on these wealthy individuals to take part in a joint enterprise of European citizenship by creating a “European Foundation for the Prevention of Environmental and Health Crises”. It would be endowed with an initial capital of 20 Bn€ offered by donors from each of the twenty-seven EU countries. An average gift of 200 million euros from 100 donors would suffice to reach this goal. This is hardly a huge effort when compared to the 50 Bn$ capital endowment that Warren Buffet and Bill Gates contributed to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation--more than 2.5 times what we are here proposing. Partially expendable, this endowment could be deployed with unrivaled response
speed in extreme situations via the simple decision of its Council of Donors: to thereby intervene in the most severely afflicted zones of the European Union or anywhere else in the world, if need be. In periods of calm, and upon the recommendation of its independent Scientific Advisory Committee, the Foundation would use the annual revenue from its capital—on the order of 500 M€—both to fund academic research in fields relevant to health/environment issues and to support strategic projects of socially and technically innovative companies — with the high-stakes intent of forestalling future crises.

Uniting European donor efforts under the aegis of one single foundation will provide the means for large-scale action, commensurate with Europe’s historical status, that will be able to address health and environmental challenges for many years to come. This initiative should certainly not be a substitute for a strong engagement of governments, in accordance with the European tradition of public investments which uphold social cohesion. However, such European commitment by its wealthiest individuals should confirm that everyone has the will and capacity to contribute as much as they can to our shared destiny – a pledge of solidarity and social élan that will strengthen us all.
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Miroslav RADMAN (Genetics, Founder of the Mediterranean Institute for Life Science, Academy of Sciences, France and Croatia)

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Markus REICHSTEIN (Climate Change, Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, Jena, Germany)

Félix REY (Virology, Institut Pasteur, Paris, Academy of Sciences, France)
Francesco SALAMINI (Plant Genetics, University of Milano, National Academy dei Lincei, Italy)

Philippe SANSONETTI (Microbiology, Institut Pasteur Paris, Collège de France, Academy of Sciences, France)

Joaquim SEGALÉS (Veterinary Sciences, Autonomous University of Barcelona and Institute of Agrifood Research and Technology, Spain)

Stig STRÖMHOLM (Private and International Law, Uppsala University, Academia Europaea-London, Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Sweden)

Bo SUNDQVIST (Ion Physics, Uppsala University, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Sweden)

Alain TEDGUI (Vascular Biology, Paris-Cardiovascular Research Center, Inserm, Université de Paris, France)

Riccardo VALENTINI (Global Change and Climatology, University of Viterbo, Italy)

Robert VAUTARD (Climatology, Pierre-Simon Laplace Institute, Guyancourt, CNRS, France)

Jörg VOGEL (Infection Biology, University of Würzburg, National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, Germany)

Francis-André WOLLMAN (Bioenergetics, Institute of Physico-Chemical Biology Paris, CNRS, Academy of Sciences, France)

Andreas ZEIHER (Cardiology, University of Frankfurt, Germany)
C. Impact of the call in the media

Nature (UK) – June 23, 2020

Le Monde (France) – June 23, 2020

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany) – June 24, 2020
Des milliardaires pour nous sauver en cas de crise écologique ? C'est le projet fou d'une fondation

Soixante-seize scientifiques du Vieux Continent ont imaginé une fondation qui pourrait intervenir en cas d’inondation ou de crise alimentaire aiguë. Elle serait financée par les grandes fortunes européennes.
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie (Poland) – June 24, 2020

Gazeta Prawna (Poland) – June 25, 2020

CNRS Info (France) – June 25, 2020

Die Presse (Austria) – June 27, 2020

Radio Télévision Suisse (Switzerland) – June 28, 2020
Place Publique (France) – June 26, 2020

La Recherche (France) – July 13, 2020

Témoignage chrétien (France) – July 16, 2020

L'Express (France) – September 16, 2020