



# The New Post-Covid19 World

The New Silk Road: a new dialogue between East and West in the context of global economic recovery

(From page 5)

Obviously, given the current level of global linkages, movement and general interdependence, the response can no longer be limited to narrowly specialized sanitary-epidemiological coordination – instead, it should be multilevel, involving political, economic, legal and information aspects.

The current crisis has shown that the mandate and mechanisms of the World Health Organization (WHO) are insufficient for the necessary coordination. Is it possible, given the changed reality and the imminent global economic crisis, to establish new rules of interaction and coordination among countries?

## The Health Silk Road. Missed opportunities? New approaches?

The nature and speed with which the coronavirus is spreading around the planet, the difficulties that international organizations have encountered in obtaining information and accessing affected areas, have uncovered a lack of institutionalized information exchange systems, even in sensitive areas such as sanitary and epidemiology.

In a situation where there is no vaccine (according to various forecasts, a confirmed and tested drug may appear within 10-12 months at earliest), the threat of new waves of the epidemic remains imminent. For example, Japan and Singapore have already been affected by the second wave of infections. Almost all countries affected by the coronavirus are preparing the population for the prospect of long-term 'cohabitation' with the virus and the development of new socio-cultural and behavioral norms.

Once the domestic situation has been more or less stabilized and national health care systems, economies and society as a whole have developed models of existence under the long-term threat of a pandemic, the time will come to review the relationships between countries, including their interaction during the post Covid-19 crisis. Already today, international experts are asking questions: what will happen to the international division of labour? What should the sup-

ply chain expect? What changes will international trade undergo? How will the regime for international financial transactions change? Does the world expect 'deglobalization'?

Certainly, one of the most pressing needs in light of a permanent potential threat of the virus will be the establishment of a multilateral system of coordination between countries on health issues. Only a constant exchange of reliable sanitary-epidemiological information and coordination of measures will allow for relatively stable international relations and functional socio-economic 'transactions'.

China's leaders have intended to take a step in this direction after the country had overcome its critical period of the epidemic. This was followed by flows of medical equipment and other protective supplies to the rest of the world including countries in Europe, North America, Latin America and Africa. Delegations of Chinese doctors were dispatched to places with a difficult epidemiological situation to share their experiences.

The Chinese leadership announced that the package of measures is at the heart of the Health Silk Road Programme, which in turn is an important part of China's global 'Belt and Road Initiative', or as it is called the 'New Silk Road'.

The theme of multilateral cooperation in the field of healthcare under the 'Belt and Way Initiative' was first mentioned in 2015 in the three-year plan 'Exchange and Cooperation on Health, 2015-2017'.

The main idea of the project was the modernization of the global health system. It included strategic medium and long-term goals of crucial importance in current times, such as the creation of a communication platform in the field of health, development of health forums at the intergovernmental level as well as the development of multilateral mechanisms for the prevention and control of infectious diseases.

The global health communications platform is the most relevant task in current times. Given the rapid spread of infections and the unpredictability of the epidemiological situation, access to and exchange of reliable information related to the outbreak is crit-



Третья международная парламентская конференция Группы Поддержки Шелкового Пути, ПА ОБСЕ, Андерматт, Швейцария, 5-7.09.2019  
(Third International Parliamentary Conference of the Silk Road Support Group OSCE PA, Andermatt, Switzerland, 5-7.09.2019)

ical. The lack of uniform standards, norms of conduct and exchange of information under the threat of a pandemic, as demonstrated by the example of the non-admission of representatives of the World Health Organization to affect area of Wuhan, China, can have tragic consequences for all countries.

For what reason did most Western countries refuse to join the Health Silk Road Initiative five years ago? In the opinion of many experts, the initiative lacked a well-defined concept and international standards necessary in order to gain international legitimacy and engage other countries, especially Western ones. The document was too densely filled with appeals for the strategic strengthening of China's global weight and influence.

Is it possible and under what conditions to revive the Chinese initiative of the global system of cooperation in health care?

If it were possible to overcome the 'China-centricity' of this initiative, which has traditionally been rejected by Western countries, and develop clear rules based on international standards, the model of multilateral cooperation based on the historical ties of the Silk Road could become a symbol of balanced participation and dialogue between the 'generalized West' and the 'generalized East'.

Such a model may also be in demand in a post-pandemic period,

when focusing on how to overcome the economic crisis, restore economic growth, create jobs and restore broader economic ties. According to the forecasts of the International Monetary Fund, the world's GDP will decline by 3 percent in 2020, which is far worse than the backlash of the 2008 financial crisis (-0.1). According to the IMF chief economist, Gita Gopinath, should the pandemic continue and the decline of the world economy exceed 8 percent in 2021, the International Labour Organization predicts that 25 million people could lose their jobs.

The forthcoming crisis is predicted to be much harsher than the 2008 financial crisis. It is worth mentioning that it was through the coordinated actions of governments of developed and developing states that the world economy managed to recover in a fairly short period of time. China's contribution to the overall basket of country stimulus measures proved to be very impressive, totalling up to \$563 billion in financial injections.

This time it is still unclear whether the measures taken in the sphere of monetary and fiscal policy will be coordinated.

## The New Silk Road and international norms. The role of the OSCE PA

As epidemiological conditions improve in most countries, the number of people infected decreases and

governments relax quarantine-related measures, the concerns about the socio-economic crisis triggered by the pandemic and the fight against it have become more visible.

While major governments are focusing on domestic health security and citizens' socio-economic priorities, global coordination and joint crisis management have been extensively discussed in virtual format by international organizations (IOs).

For example, the United Nations has presented a 'Road Map for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19'. The UN has identified three 'cornerstones of the response'. The first is the Solidarity Response Fund (a WHO initiative established in March to finance the fight against the coronavirus). The second is the UN plan for a global humanitarian response to the pandemic. The third is the implementation of the UN socio-economic recovery plan.

The important role of parliamentarians in building a system of social trust during the Covid-19 crisis was discussed at the online meeting of the Bureau of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The meeting emphasized that in the difficult period of restricted movement, every effort should be made to continue the work of the OSCE PA as an important multilateral platform, including coordination between the legislative and executive branches of government.

The experience of the past years has shown that the OSCE PA is not only a representative multilateral forum uniting parliamentary delegations from 57 countries on the axis from Vancouver to Vladivostok, but provides effective tools to contribute to solving specific political and socio-economic problems. Among the important functions are to organize the monitoring and observation of elections, to participate in resolving local conflicts, to mitigate migration crises, to prevent terrorist threats, and to fight corruption and cyberthreats.

It should be noted that not so long ago an interesting interdisciplinary body was formed within the OSCE PA. On the initiative of 17 delegations of the OSCE PA member states in Minsk, a Silk Road Support Group (SRG) was established under the OSCE PA in July 2017. Today, the Group includes 25 delegations representing Western and Eastern Europe, South-West and Central Asia.

Both the Group's leaders and delegations members have consistently emphasized that the Group is not a 'promoter' of China's Belt and Road Initiative, but aims to create a representative, legitimate communication platform for the exchange of information and experience among the delegations of countries interested in developing multilateral cooperation between West and East based on the symbolic model of the historical Silk Road. It should also be noted that China, not

being a member of the OSCE PA, is thus not a member of the SRG.

Within the framework of the Group's activities and upon initiative of the delegations of the OSCE PA member states, conferences were organized in Baku, Vienna, Minsk and Andermatt (Switzerland). At each of these conferences, the host country tried not only to demonstrate its own investment potential and economic advantages, but also to identify its national 'New Silk Road', with which it could later be integrated into the global Eurasian initiative.

It is noteworthy that all of the past conferences were attended by representatives of the executive branch at the level of ministers of foreign affairs and economy, as well as by heads of big national companies. This shows that most countries, including Western Europe, are not opposed to the New Silk Road and are interested in creating global channels of interaction between Europe and Asia so long as those are founded on terms of equality and non-discrimination.

The role of a so-called 'guarantor' could be assumed by the SRG OSCE PA, focusing on the creation of mechanisms for multilateral coordination, monitoring, and regular exchange of information on the organization of interdisciplinary events involving representatives of the executive and legislative branches of government, businesses, and the expert community.

The OSCE PA, as an organization with experience in monitoring processes, broad multiparty representation, the ability to influence international public opinion as well as the decision-making of executive authorities through parliamentary mechanisms, is best suited for this role.

The predicted severe and long-lasting crisis of the world economy will require new non-standard intercountry instruments and channels of interaction between different regions of the world. The renewed 'New Silk Road' may become one of the models of multilateral cooperation, offering a new agenda of economic and socio-cultural relations between the so-called developed and developing countries.

With the Participation of Alexandra Furio, University of St. Gallen

## CHINAPLAS 2021

Plastic packaging still confronting sustainability challenges



The coronavirus has only helped to underscore the importance of plastic packaging when it comes to keeping food contamination-free and to preserving its freshness and usability for longer. This is particularly vital now, given how millions of people worldwide are sheltering in place, and doing their best to make their provisions stretch.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated another trend that has a major impact on product packaging – e-commerce. Online shopping already was showing strong growth, but the current stay-at-home phenomenon has only increased demand. An even broader awakening to the convenience of delivery to your doorstep may forever reshape parts of the retail sector.

In North America, it reported, the number of online orders for web-only online retailers soared 52% year-over-year in the United States and Canada for the period of March 22 through April 4, according to an online tracker from marketing platform GoodData. Revenue for web-only retailers in the U.S. and Canada was up 30% year-over-year for the period.

In the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region during the same two-week

period, year-over-year transactions for web-only retailers grew by 23%, according to Emarsys/GoodData. During the same period, year-over-year revenue was up 19% in the region.

### E-commerce growing sharply

Virus or not, retail e-commerce is rising sharply. New York-based consumer research firm Statista Inc. said that U.S. online retail sales of physical goods amounted to \$365.2 billion in 2019, and projects that will rise to nearly \$600 billion in 2024.

Consider also that China's annual, 24-hour online shopping spree known as Single's Day – last held on Nov. 11, 2019 – generated record sales estimated at some \$38 billion.

The darker side of such a sales boom relates to the impact on the environment of so

much product packaging. China's State Post Bureau reported that e-commerce giants delivered 1.88 billion packages from Nov. 11 to Nov. 16 last year, an annual increase of almost 26%. Greenpeace estimated that the waste generated exceeded 250,000 tonnes.

The volume of packaging material used by China's e-commerce and express delivery sectors hit 9.4 million tonnes last year, and is on course to more than quadruple to 41.3 million tonnes by 2025 if they keep up the rate of increase, according to Greenpeace and other non-government bodies.

### Sustainability still important

So, booming e-commerce offers sales growth for key sectors as well as greater convenience (and safety) now for many, but it clearly comes at a cost. While public health trumps sustainability concerns at the moment, it's clear that the packaging sector cannot afford to take its collective eye off the ball when it comes to being eco-conscious.

As Dow Inc. CEO Jim Fitterling mentioned in ANTEC 2020 virtual conference on March 31: 'The COVID-19 crisis is going to end, but the air we breathe, our water and the land we live on is here forever. And we can't afford to lose the momentum that we've started to gain already to safeguard the environment and help us move to a more circular economy.'

Leaders in the European Union also are concerned that the current virus-driven economic slump will cause the focus on sustainability to wane, writing in a joint statement in mid-April, 'We should withstand the temptations of short-term solutions in response to the present crisis that risk locking the EU in a fossil fuel economy for decades to come.'

These conditions offer both extreme challenges and enormous opportunities for brand owners, consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies, and for those designing and manufacturing the packaging.

### Multiple approaches being pursued

Such firms are exploring and advancing multiple strategies to address these issues, including increased plastics recycling, more reusable packaging, greater use of biomaterials, reduced material use, and design for circularity. Package designers also need to take into account the different priorities for on-shelf vs. e-commerce products. Eye-catching package design is less vital for products sold online than in the store, but ensuring the shipped product arrives at its destination undamaged is vital.

Advances in these areas take diverse forms, but consider the efforts being by CPGs to redesign the e-commerce-friendly and highly popular – but largely unrecyclable – flexible pouches to make them more eco-friendly. This mostly involves finding a way to convert those pouches' multilayer, multimaterial constructions, which till now have been needed to protect the contents from such unwelcome factors such as moisture, oxygen, and ultraviolet light, into recyclable, mono-material structures.

### For example: mono-material pouches

Several advances are happening in this area. Austria's Mondi Group, for just one example, worked with several partners for four years to develop an all-polyethylene, stand-up pouch for Germany's Werner & Mertz GmbH to use with its Frosch-brand detergent. This patented pouch features detachable decorative panels on both sides, to help enable easier recycling.

Another new technology, called AeroFlex and developed by Procter & Gamble Co., enables liquid packaging in a flexible yet rigid package. Made with coextruded flexible film, the product leverages compressed air to inflate specific portions of the pouch, specifically along the edges, to bring a degree of rigidity not otherwise possible in a flexible package.

An AeroFlex package uses half the plastic needed to blow mold a traditional bottle and can be delivered as roll stock to a filling facility, meaning it is easier to ship throughout the supply chain. In addition to significantly reducing plastic at the source, the Chicago-based company's vision is to be 100% recycle ready by 2025. While enabling seamless, edge-to-edge artwork, AeroFlex also features a no-leak, self-sealing valve that offers easy, one-handed operation by the consumer.

### Loop platform touts reusability

New Jersey recycler TerraCycle Inc., meanwhile, is taking a completely different approach with its Loop circular shopping platform. Loop has gained support from many of the world's best-known brands, ranging from Unilever, PepsiCo, and Nestlé to Danone, Procter & Gamble, and UPS.

The Loop system uses UPS to ship a variety of food, household cleaning, and personal-care products in a reusable and collapsible, padded container called the Loop tote. The products are dispensed from reusable containers, which are returned in the same reusable tote when empty. Some have dubbed it 'the milk-

man model,' in a nod to the old days when milk was delivered to your doorstep in glass bottles, which were later collected, cleaned, and reused.

'Loop,' maintains TerraCycle founder and CEO Tom Szaky, 'is an engine for CPGs to shift from disposable products that consumers own to durable ones they borrow.' The brand owners, meanwhile, actually own the package, which is meant to be reused at least 100 times. The impact on packaging is obvious – instead of trying to make the cheapest possible disposable package or container, the brands are incentivized to design hand-some, reusable containers out of durable materials.

Numerous companies are also investing in initiatives and technologies to advance both mechanical and chemical recycling, and to develop biocompatible and compostable materials.

CHINAPLAS is further postponed to April 13-16, 2021 to be held in the Shenzhen World Exhibition & Convention Center, PR China. Focusing on 'Smart Manufacturing', 'Innovative Materials', and 'Green & Circular Solutions', the organizer is expect to present 400,000 square meters of exhibition space.

CHINAPLAS 2021 is organized by Adsale Exhibition Services Ltd., Beijing Yazhan Exhibition Services Ltd., and Adsale Exhibition Services (Shanghai) Ltd. and co-organized by China National Light Industry Council – China Plastics Processing Industry Association, China Plastics Machinery Industry Association, Guangdong Plastics Industry Association, Messe Düsseldorf China Ltd., the Plastic Trade Association of Shanghai. The event is also supported by various plastics and rubber associations in China and abroad.

First introduced in 1983, CHINAPLAS has been approved by UFI (The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry) since 2006. CHINAPLAS is exclusively sponsored by the Europe's Association for Plastics and Rubber Machinery Manufacturers (EUROMAP) in China for the 31st time. CHINAPLAS is currently Asia's leading plastics and rubber trade fair.

## ILA Goes Digital

The world's first digital aerospace show

As the world's longest-running aerospace show ILA has always stood for innovation and leadership in this high-tech industry. In these times in which due to the coronavirus pandemic all large events have been banned, ILA is charting a new course. Starting on 13 May, as the world's first digital aerospace show, ILA will provide fascinating and forward-looking online content that reflects the dynamic developments and innovative drive of the industry.

Thus, the fascinating world of aerospace can also be experienced from afar. Every Wednesday from 13 May until the end of July the latest digital content will be available on the ILA Goes Digital website.

The wide-ranging programme targets the key ILA topics of innovation, sustainability and digitalisation, the driving forces of future technologies in aerospace. Discussions will look at how to navigate the path towards carbon-neutral aviation, smart factories and cybersecurity, for example.

Whether for decision-makers from politics, business, science, research, companies, or industry newcomers and fans of aviation, ILA has always been a platform for exchanging ideas and networking in order to keep in

touch with the technological future of the industry.

This is an important function it will also fulfil in digital form. At ILA Goes Digital the focus will be just as much on interviews with industry experts, webinars and presentations of innovative technology as it will be on matchmaking. Attendees can join the discussion and make contact under the hashtags #ILAgoesDigital, #AeroSpaceInsights and #WeAreAviation.

Particularly in these difficult times, being able to exchange information on specialist subjects and on a personal level is more important than ever, in order to drive forward innovation and help shape the future of the aerospace industry.

