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– Markus ENGELS, Global Solutions Initiative

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Markus ENGELS
Global Solutions Initiative
Berlin, Germany

The Global Solutions Summit in 2021: Framing the crisis

I am sure everybody will agree that the COVID-19 challenge will be formative for an entire generation. It has exposed the vulnerability of the modern world, it has underlined the inter-connectivity between societies and it has shown us that something as small as a virus can easily stop the world from turning and the economy from working.

While the COVID-19 crisis delivered more bad news each and every day, killed and debilitated people, widened social gaps and challenged the world economy, it proved at the same time how incredibly powerful a united world society working in cooperation can be: Within weeks, we managed to approve multiple vaccines and organized distribution of vaccines around the world. The G20 pledged not to forget the poorer regions and the EU agreed on a common purchasing policy to make sure that the richest nations could not buy all vaccines at the expense of the poor. These later trends make me optimistic, because COVID-19 highlighted

one thing: that either everybody must be protected against the virus or nobody will be safe. We are all sitting in the same boat in fighting the virus. And obviously it is crucial not to forget that COVID-19 is only one crisis in an orchestra of urgent global challenges like climate change, loss of biodiversity, global inequality, and technological disruption which is changing everything in politics, economy, society, communication and personal relations. All of these challenges, some call them mega-crises, are interconnected and can't be answered as long as people remain in their silo-mentalities. Interconnectivity of crises requires the interconnectivity of thinking!

The Global Solution Initiatives (GSI), and its Summit

The purpose of the non-profit GSI is to support the G20 and its related engagement groups, especially the Think20, the G20's global network of think tanks, which provides research-based policy advice to the G20. It is critical in this respect to overcome silo-mentality, thinking just within disciplines, and to understand the links between the greatest challenges of our days, and some fundamental misconceptions.

Therefore, the Global Solutions Initiative aims to provide a platform for the G20 and other international organizations and to all G20-related engagement groups. It offers a forum for the global civil society to strengthen interna-

tional cooperation and put forward evidence-based and research-based policy recommendations. Within the GSI network the researchers and think tanks discuss their research-based proposals with thought leaders from politics, business and civil society to make sure that the recommendations can be implemented. The Global Solutions Summit, which takes place in Berlin in the middle of every G20 Presidency, was transformed into a digital format in 2020 and reached thousands of participants and brought together 220 panelists from around the world. In 2021 the Summit will take place on May 27-28th and will promote the Italian G20 priorities while building bridges to the upcoming Indonesian and Indian G20 Presidencies in 2022/2023.

Whoever is registered to our network will be informed on a regular basis about the formats for the Summit in 2021, the topics and concepts, and all GSI activities.

Recoupling-Narrative of the GSI

The key narrative of the GSI is “recoupling” which was established by the GSI president Dennis Snower. It argues that there has been a process of decoupling of economic progress and social prosperity, of technological progress and progress in sustainability, and there is a growing gap between wealth and health. This is one reason why globalization is under pressure and why the world is witnessing rising populism and conspiracy theories. To combat this rise

in “me-first” thinking, which is a response to people and societies not seeing the economic progress of nations and companies reflected in their individual and social wellbeing, we must bring these diverging strands back together. It is obvious that there is a need for a recoupled world and for a aligning progress in different areas, including social and environmental progress for the many, not just the few.

COVID-19 has partly exacerbated the gaps in and between societies and therefore it is consistent that the G20 in 2021 is focusing on the overcoming of the social crisis linked to the pandemic, under the framing of “people, planet and prosperity”. Therefore, the Global Solutions Summit in May will underline the need for a great realignment in economy, society and politics and highlight ways to recouple societies and different forms of progress. Empowering people, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all is what recoupling is all about. To do this, it is crucial that a great realignment in multilateralism includes both different local perspectives and regional experience. The regions and cities around the world are dealing with and managing the mega-crises on a daily basis with. As a consequence, we offer the Urban20, the G20 engagement group focused on cities and urbanization, a platform to discuss their global solutions.

There is also a need for a new understanding of the role of basic infrastructure in building up resilient societies. There needs to be a realignment here as well. As the GSI

aims to become a common global good fostering a civil-society-driven multilateralism, it recognizes that societies need sustainable infrastructure as the figurative cement between young and old, different genders, poor and rich, and cities and countryside.

All of these discussions on implementable solutions to global problems that simultaneously envision a recoupled world of empowered individuals within thriving societies will be deepened during the Global Solutions Summit in May 2021.

New measurement of wealth, The Great Realignment and digital governance

One fundamental misconception which leads to a faulty incentive system is a narrow concept of wealth and progress. In the light of climate change and COVID-19 it is apparent that real progress can only happen if it includes progress for the whole of society, the people within it and the environment around us. True resilience requires unity in society as well as individuals ready to handle the rapid change and an environment which is healthy. All of these criteria are neither fulfilled in the growth-orientated concept of GDP nor in the traditional understanding of the purpose of economy and business. We must see the purpose of economies as the gratification of people's needs and the purpose of business as serving demands in the interests of social

progress and social cohesion.

The recoupling dashboard, which was proposed in 2020 by Dennis Snower, Katharina Lima de Miranda and the GSI, addresses this misconception of wealth and progress. It proposes a new measurement of success by bringing together economic growth and wealth on the one hand, and the environment, social impact and empowerment of people on the other. The new measurement is crucial in the context of COVID-19 recovery, as we strive for simultaneous goals including economic stimulation, job creation, climate change mitigation, inequality reduction and multilateral system renewal. Hence, it is important to have a new approach to the question: what is success and wealth?

In this context one must also take into account the situation in the digital world: in a nutshell, just a few companies are accumulating data from billions of people around the world. This neither serves the interest of innovation, because it limits the chances of start-ups and SMEs, nor consumer rights protection or data safety. The issue of digital governance related to ownership of data might further worsen poverty and inequality as the benefits from digitalization are unevenly distributed between the few and the many. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a new digital system. Dennis Snower, together with Paul Twomey, has proposed a new data regime on digital governance which serves to give individuals back control over their own data and is currently being discussed in the EU. The Global Solutions Summit

will widen this discussion and include players from business and civil society to foster recoupling in the digital age.

Outlook

Digital formats are offering fantastic options to include more stakeholders and diverse perspectives in these discussions around the world. While the Global Solutions Summit in the age pre-COVID-19 could only host around 1,200 participants from around the world, its digital twin in 2021 opened the floor for the highest number of participants in the history of the GSI. This “forced innovation” will remain in 2021 and afterwards and the GSI will upgrade its digital competence while bringing back its physical meetings as soon as possible. We are all eager to meet in person again and have an exchange without a screen between us, but only as soon as this is responsible and in the interest of everyone’s health.