

# FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Challenges & Opportunities for Europe

Thursday 8th July 2021

Athens, Greece



Dear guests, dear members of the academic committee, dear participants,

On behalf of the Institute for Alternative Policies, ENA, I would like to welcome you to the hybrid event of the FORCE project.

## **ENA: a brief presentation**

Please allow me to start with a brief presentation of our Institute, ENA.

ENA is an independent, non-profit research institution created in 2017. Through systematic and hard work and the active contribution of a wide network of members, the Institute has gained its place in the public debate in Greece with more than 300 publications and 50 events in only a few years.

The activity of ENA relies on various Units & Observatories:

- The Economic Analysis unit
- The Observatory on Sustainable Development
- The Social Analysis unit
- The unit on European and International Affairs
- The Observatory on Commons
- The Political Analysis unit
- & the Centre for Political Theory.

The scope of the Institute's activities, which is rather wide for such a young establishment, has proven to be of great value for our work.

In times of crucial challenges and structural changes (often called “mega-trends” by international organisations) no single dimension -*economic, social, environmental, political or technological*- can be truly examined adequately, if not assessed in close relation to the other dimensions.

The necessity of systemic thinking and holistic approaches is increasingly recognized by policy-makers and international organisations. The SDGs are maybe the most well-known approach seeking a balanced relation between the three dimensions of development: the economic, social, and environmental one.

## **ENA & 4IR**

The pandemic crisis indeed has accelerated and extended the utilization of digital technologies in the economy, in the workplace, by public authorities. The technological dimension is gaining in importance during the pandemic to a point that it is often perceived as an end in itself, even elevated to a higher-value and new vision for our post-pandemic society.

Despite the undisputable opportunities and astounding possibilities of the 4IR, a central question is more and more debated in the international and European public sphere:

*Under which conditions can the new technological revolution contribute to address the great challenges faced by humanity, namely:*

- *Coping with the climate threat and adapting our way of life and our economies to the new climate and environmental conditions*

&

- *Tackling the vast and unprecedented social inequalities which have increased further since the outbreak of the pandemic crisis*

Fears, vulnerabilities and risks concerning the 4IR are also expressed regarding potential adverse impact on labour conditions, civil rights, the environment, economic democracy and society as a whole.

In short, how can we ensure that technology is developed primarily for satisfying collective and social needs in a sustainable way?

This has been the central topic of a series of events that ENA has inaugurated in 2021 under the title "*Technology & Social Needs under condition of Climate & Digital Transitions*".

This leads us to the necessity to establish a comprehensive legislative and policy framework both at EU and national levels in order to maximise positive effects of the 4IR and to minimise negative ones.

### **The EU policy agenda**

The EU has expressed its intention to work actively to promote its human-centric vision of digitization and to promote a use of new technologies which will adhere to the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

A series of significant policy and legislative initiatives are taking place at the EU-level regarding AI, data management, IoT, the new European industrial strategy, cybersecurity and platform work.

The current workstreams of the Union regarding the 4IR represent with no doubt a very positive initiative as Member states will definitively benefit from an EU-wide coordinated framework in this area.

However, the size and nature of challenges associated with the 4IR requires the “activation” of all social actors in initiatives aiming at evaluating and improving new regulations and strategies.

Social participation can prove to be a key-input for policy-makers in order to help the transition from the current techno-centric approach leading to the acceptance of *“whatever is achievable from an engineering point of view”* and *“whatever is marketable from a business point of view”* to what is *“essential, needed and sustainable from a social point of view”*.

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Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I would like to mention that the event will be recorded, uploaded on the project’s website and shared through ENA’s social media. A series of on-camera interviews is also taking place in parallel with the workshop.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear colleagues who have contributed to the organisation of this workshop:

- the members of the academic committee and
- most particularly, the members of the project team, Marina Skourogianni, Elena Oikonomou, Vaggelis Vitzilaios and our Director of

Research, Nikos Erinakis. They have all paid great efforts to prepare the event in the difficult and moving conditions caused by the pandemic.

Dear speakers and guests, we are most grateful for your participation and contribution.

We wish you a constructive and interesting workshop.

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Project FORCE coordinator

[www.enaforce.eu](http://www.enaforce.eu)

ENA Institute for Alternative Policies