

## **Presentation on the EU response regarding the COVID19 crisis**

By the Maison de l'Europe Angers & Maine-et-Loire – Europe Direct on the 15/05/2020

Faced with this unprecedented health crisis the EU is trying to deploy the various means at its disposal, however it's useful to keep in mind that its ability to act depends to a large extent on the member states and their willingness to work together.

As health is not a "strong" competence of the EU, the Commission was not equipped to take over the management of the pandemic response from the outset.

However the European Union has the supporting competence regarding health in the member states which means it can coordinate and support the member states health measures. But because it's a supporting competence the EU can only intervene if its actions are more effective than those carried out at national level.

I will now present the economic measures, the progress regarding research and also the measures regarding citizens during this global crisis.

### **Economic measures**

Exceptional financial decisions were adopted at European level to support the Member States:

The European Central Bank has decided to inject eight hundred and seventy billion euros into the economy to allow States, particularly the most indebted, to continue to borrow on the financial markets at low cost.

The "structural funds" were quickly mobilised to buy medical equipment, support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and employment.

Thirty seven billion euros were made available under the "Coronavirus Investment Initiative".

In addition, the European Investment Bank will inject two hundred billion euros in loans to finance SMEs thanks to the establishment of a twenty five billion euros pan-European guarantee fund supported by the Member States.

The European financial reserve set up during the Greek crisis ("European Stability Mechanism") will be activated to support Member States that request it up to 2% of their GDP.

Up to two hundred and forty billion euros may thus be lent to finance expenditure intended to " support health and treatment systems in connection with the Covid-19 crisis".

Finally, the Commission has adopted a new instrument, called the SURE initiative, to help countries finance measures to support the self-employed affected by the coronavirus.

These short-time working schemes, as already put in place by France and Germany for example, will allow companies to recover their production capacity more quickly and to restart more easily when the crisis ends. Thanks to the EU's "triple A" rating on the financial markets, this mechanism will make it possible to grant loans to Member States of up to one hundred billion euros in total.

At the same time, the European Commission has relaxed the budgetary rules to allow Member States to adopt exceptional budgetary measures in response to the coronavirus crisis.

The Commission has decided to trigger for the very first time the "general derogation clause" of the Stability and Growth Pact, giving maximum flexibility to European budgetary rules (3% deficit criteria).

This gives national governments the ability to inject as much money into the real economy as necessary.

The rules on state aid have also been temporarily relaxed to allow states to support companies in difficulty.

### **As far as research is concerned**

The Commission has mobilised up to one hundred and forty million euros to support the development of vaccines, new treatments, screening tests and medical systems to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to save lives.

Eighteen trans-European research projects involving one hundred and forty research teams have been selected to receive forty eight point five million euros from the EU's Horizon 2020 programme for funding research and innovation.

France, notably with the Institut Pasteur, is participating in eight of these projects and is also the lead partner of the I-MOVE-COVID-19 project, a new multidisciplinary European network for research, prevention and control of the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition, up to forty five million euros , also from the Horizon 2020 programme, is being mobilised through the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a public-private partnership between the European Commission and the pharmaceutical industry, which promotes and accelerates the development of treatments where existing medicines do not exist or are insufficient.

### **EU COVID-19 Data Platform**

Furthermore, a new data sharing platform for researchers on coronavirus called EU COVID-19 Data Platform has been launched in April by the European Commission and partners to rapidly collect and share comprehensive coronavirus research data, such as DNA sequences, protein structures, data from pre-clinical research and clinical trials, as well as epidemiological data, to advance research efforts.

### **Hackathon**

Another measure is the EUvsVirus Hackathon: which connected civil society, innovators, partners, and investors across Europe in order to develop innovative solutions for coronavirus-related challenges.

Over thirty thousand people from across the EU and beyond submitted more than two thousand projects related to various domains including health and life, business continuity, remote working and education, social and political cohesion, digital finance, and other challenges.

The Hackathon took place at the end of april and allowed to select one hundred and seventeen finalists who will take part in a Matchathon at the end of may, an event where the teams will meet (and match) with corporations and investors around the world to put their innovative solutions into production.

### **Equipment shortages**

The Commission has set up a strategic reserve of medical equipment under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, including protective respirators and masks, to help the most affected EU countries. The EU pays 90% of the cost of the reserve.

The Emergency Response Coordination Centre will manage the distribution of the equipment to ensure that it goes where it is most needed.

The European budget has mobilised thirty seven billion euros to buy masks and respirators, but also to support SMEs and employment in the sectors most affected.

The EU ensures the smooth flow of trade in goods in the internal market: in fact the Commission has asked the Member States to set up reserved lanes, or green corridors, at internal borders for the movement of goods. It has also introduced greater flexibility in the rules on driving and rest periods for lorry drivers.

Several other measures have been put into place such as bulk purchase of medical equipment and production of equipment meeting medical standards and the temporary exemption of customs duties for imports of medical devices and protective equipment from countries outside the EU.

Shipments of protective masks came from the strategic RescEU distribution centres.

RescEU, is the European programme of natural disaster management and is completely financed by the EU budget.

The EU will also be delivering 1.5 million masks to 17 EU countries and the UK to protect healthcare workers against coronavirus in the beginning of may.

This is part of the Emergency Support Instrument, providing 10 million masks over the coming weeks to ease the impacts of the pandemic.

### **Now regarding the repatriation of Europeans citizens :**

Since the beginning of the outbreak, over fifty eight thousand stranded EU citizens have been brought home so far on board of repatriation flights facilitated and co-financed by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Many more intra-European flights chartered directly by Member States, are bringing citizens home daily.

The **EU** is supporting Member States with their consular assistance to EU citizens through its network of local consular correspondents in the EU Delegations.

The EU “consular toolkit” involves practical information to EU citizens in third countries on their options.

This includes EU collaboration on repatriating EU citizens and advice on how to handle travel restrictions around the world.

And when the option of repatriating EU citizens via commercial flights is no longer possible, the European Response Coordination Centre, together with EU Member States, steps in to assess difficult situations worldwide demanding special assets (flights, ships).

EU Member States can then activate the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which coordinates and co-finances the special transport assets mobilised for repatriation.

### **Support for key sectors**

To swiftly support agricultural sector and food markets following the outbreak of the coronavirus, the European Commission has proposed exceptional measures.

The Commission proposes to grant private storage aid for dairy and meat products, flexibility in the implementation of market support programmes to refocus funding priorities, and exceptional derogation from EU competition rules to stabilise the markets in different sectors.

Such agreements and decisions would only be valid for a period of maximum six months. Consumer price movements will be monitored closely to avoid adverse effects.

### **Coronavirus global response pledging marathon**

With the Coronavirus Global Response, the European Union is joining forces with global partners (with France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway and Saudi Arabia for exemple as well as additional partners from across the world) to kick-start a worldwide pledging effort to develop treatments, vaccines and diagnostics (universally available and affordable). On the fourth of May, President von der Leyen hosted a global online pledging event.

The initial goal was to reach seven point five billion euros worth of pledges at the end of may. Seven.four billion euros has been raised since the fourth of May.

### **Consumer’s protection**

As the new virus spreads across the EU, rogue traders advertise and sell products, such as protective masks, caps and hand sanitizers to consumers which allegedly prevent or cure an infection.

To tackle these scams, the European Commission recently launched a number of screenings of online platforms and advertisements to ensure that consumers in the EU are not being subjected to misleading content.

Online platforms (such as Amazon, Microsoft, Ebay, Facebook, Google, Yahoo...) have responded positively and demonstrated a strong commitment to take down misleading ads and illegal advertising, thereby protecting consumers.

### **Fighting disinformation**

Misinformation and disinformation are thriving, including on COVID-19, with for exemple false claims such as “it does not help to wash your hands” or “the Coronavirus is only a danger to the elderly” potentially endanger lives.

The EU used several new tools to protect the well-being of citizens :

The Commission has launched a dedicated Coronavirus response website that provides real-time information on the virus and the EU response.

The Strategic Communication Task Forces are monitoring and exposing attempts by foreign state actors to spread disinformation about the Coronavirus.

The fact-checking and academic communities supported by the EU have stepped up their efforts.

For example, WeVerify is widely used by tens of thousands of journalists worldwide.

The EU is also working with social media platforms (twitter, facebook and youtube for example).

So now I will just give you some information regarding the new political guidelines of the EU

This crisis arises at the beginning of a new European agenda for 2021-2027 (with the election of the European parliament and the establishment of the new Commission last year) and we wanted to present the political guidelines of the new Commission and specifically the Green Deal.

In these political guidelines entitled “A Union that strives for more”, there are 6 headline ambitions:

- An economy that works for people
- A Europe fit for the digital age
- Protecting our European way of life
- A stronger Europe in the world
- A new push for European democracy
- A European Green Deal

The European Green Deal is the roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable.

The EU wants to turn climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making the transition just and inclusive for all.

The European Green Deal provides a roadmap with actions to

- boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy
- restore biodiversity and cut pollution.

It outlines investments needed and financing tools available, and explains how to ensure a just and inclusive transition.

The objective of the EU is climate neutrality in 2050.

To do this, the Commission proposed a European Climate Law turning the political commitment into a legal obligation and a trigger for investment.

Reaching this target will require action by all sectors of our economy, including

- investing in environmentally-friendly technologies
- supporting industry to innovate
- rolling out cleaner, cheaper and healthier forms of private and public transport
- decarbonising the energy sector
- making sure buildings are more energy efficient
- working with international partners to improve global environmental standards

The EU will also provide financial support and technical assistance to help people, businesses and regions that are most affected by the move towards the green economy.

This is called the Just Transition Mechanism and will help mobilise at least one hundred billion euros over the period 2021-2027 in the most affected regions.

The fear with the COVID19 crisis was that the EU forgot the Green Deal altogether in the recovery plan, however the president of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen insured that the environmental concerns would not be forgotten, in a speech from the end of april she said :

“With the billions of euros that will be invested to restart economy we should avoid falling back in old polluting habits. Instead the EU should bounce back better and we can make our planet better by investing in: renewable energy, clean mobility, energy efficient houses, low carbon steel, buying sustainable food, reusing material for exemple.

That is the essence of the European Green Deal.

The European Green Deal is an agenda for transforming our economy to make our economy more competitive and improve our quality of life and we will make it our motor for the recovery. We can turn the coronavirus crisis into an opportunity to rebuild our economies differently and make our society and planet healthier and more resilient also for our children.

With the green recovery we will come out of the crisis healthier and stronger.”

To conclude, we can hope that from the crisis a new European Union will arise stronger and greener but it’s too soon to know, we will discover at the end of may the updated EU budget proposal with the COVID19 recovery plan.

Sources :

<https://decodeursdeleurope.eu/coronavirus-leurope-ne-fait-rien/>

<https://www.touteleurope.eu/actualite/covid-19-ce-que-l-union-europeenne-peut-et-ne-peut-pas-faire.html>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en)

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76203/good-stories-consular-support-eu-citizens-stranded-abroad\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76203/good-stories-consular-support-eu-citizens-stranded-abroad_en)

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_722](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_722)

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/corona\\_fighting\\_disinformation.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/corona_fighting_disinformation.pdf)

<https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/actualites/covid19-26032020-en.pdf>

<https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/divers/covid-european-decisions.pdf>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/political-guidelines-next-commission\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf)

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu_en)

<https://www.euractiv.fr/section/economie/news/timmermans-promises-green-recovery-to-eu-lawmakers/>

#### **Contact information :**

Maison de l’Europe Angers & Maine-et-Loire – Europe Direct

14 Place Imbach (1<sup>er</sup> étage) - 49100 ANGERS

Email : [maisondeleurope49@gmail.com](mailto:maisondeleurope49@gmail.com)

Tel : 06 84 59 30 96

Site : [www.maisondeleurope49.eu](http://www.maisondeleurope49.eu)

Facebook : [www.facebook.com/MDE49](https://www.facebook.com/MDE49)

Twitter : [www.twitter.com/MDE49](https://www.twitter.com/MDE49)