

Resolution on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID 19 pandemic and its consequences

2020/2616(RSP) - 17/04/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew and Greens /EFA groups.

A united and decisive response to a shared crisis

Parliament expressed its admiration for all those on the front line in the fight against the pandemic and stressed the need to pull together as a community and ensure that no country is left to fend for itself in the fight against the virus and its consequences.

Concerned by the initial inability of Member States to act collectively, Parliament noted that Member States now understand that only through cooperation, trust and solidarity will they be able to overcome this crisis. It called on the Commission and the Member States to act together and rise to the challenge and ensure that the Union emerges stronger from this crisis.

European solidarity and action in the health sector

Parliament welcomed the European solidarity in action shown by Member States in their treating of patients from other Member States, supplying health care equipment, including via EU-led procurement initiatives and stockpiling, and in repatriating citizens.

Members insisted that borders must remain open within the EU for the circulation of personal protective equipment (PPE), food, medicine, medical devices, blood-derived products and organs as well as the supply chain in the

Single Market.

They called *inter alia* for:

- substantial strengthening of the competences, budget and staff of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to enable them to coordinate medical responses in times of crisis;
- the creation of a European Health Response Mechanism to better prepare and respond in a common and coordinated way to any type of health or sanitary crisis that emerges at EU level;
- increased support for research, development and innovation programmes aimed at understanding the disease, accelerating diagnosis and screening and contributing to vaccine development;
- the adoption of a coordinated post-lockdown approach in the EU in order to avoid a resurgence of the virus and the joint development of criteria for lifting the quarantine.

Members called on the Commission to launch an effective exit strategy that includes largescale testing, and PPE for the largest possible number of citizens. They encouraged the Member States to develop more systematic testing on infection and exposure to the virus and to share best practices.

European solutions to overcoming the economic and social consequences

Parliament called on the Commission to propose a massive recovery and reconstruction package for investment to support the European economy after the crisis, beyond what the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Central Bank (ECB) are already doing, that is part of the new multiannual financial framework (MFF). The necessary investment shall be financed by an increased MFF, the existing EU funds and financial instruments, and recovery bonds guaranteed by the EU budget. This package shall not involve the mutualisation of existing debt and shall be oriented to future investment.

The European Green Deal and the digital transformation shall be at the heart of these measures in order to kick-start the economy.

Members insisted, therefore, on the adoption of an ambitious MFF that has an increased budget in line with the Union's objectives and the projected impact on EU economies by the crisis.

Parliament also emphasised the need to:

- promote the banking sector's duty of initiative to grant a temporary lower or halt debt or mortgage repayments of companies and citizens facing financial difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- do more for SMEs, to help them maintain jobs and manage their liquidity;
- give priority to support measures for the most vulnerable citizens, women and children exposed to domestic violence, the elderly and the disabled through a specific exceptional support fund;
- pay particular attention to equal access to health care and ensure that the rights of people in residential institutions, who are more exposed to the risk of infection, in particular the elderly and the disabled, are guaranteed;
- ensure that workers in Europe, including the self-employed, are shielded from income loss;
- provide support to the cultural and creative sectors as they play an important role for our economy and our social life and are severely affected by the current crisis.

The EU must seize the opportunity and propose a Health Autonomy Action in strategic areas such as the active pharmaceutical ingredients essential for the manufacture of medicine, and thus reduce its dependence on third countries without undermining the rewards that open economies derive from international trade.

EU Solidarity Funds against the coronavirus

Parliament proposed the creation of an EU COVID-19 Solidarity Fund of at least EUR 50 billion, consisting of up to EUR 20 billion outside the MFF ceilings in grants and up to EUR 30 billion in loans, guaranteed by the EU Budget, supporting the financial efforts undertaken by the healthcare sectors of all Member States during the current crisis.

Protecting democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights

Parliament stressed that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the rule of law must continue to apply and that the authorities must ensure, in this state of emergency, that everyone enjoys the same rights and protection.

Noting the emergence of contact tracing applications on mobile devices to warn anyone who may have come into contact with an infected person, Members called on the Commission and Member States to be fully transparent about the functioning of these contact-tracing applications, so that citizens can check the underlying protocol for security and privacy.

Stressing that disinformation about the COVID-19 epidemic is currently a major public health problem, Members called on the EU to set up a European information source so that all citizens have access to accurate and verified information. They stressed that the EU must become more resilient against crises in general, to remain free from unwarranted political and economic influence, especially from China and Russia.

A post-crisis Union that is stronger

Parliament called for a greater powers for the EU to act on cross-border health threats, through new and strengthened instruments, to ensure that in future the Union can act without delay to coordinate the response at European level, and direct the necessary resources to where they are most needed, be they material (e.g. face masks, respirators and medicines) or financial.

Member States were urged to put aside their differences and to act in the general interest and in a spirit of solidarity by making immediate use of the dedicated Treaty provisions to act accordingly.

Members stressed that it is imperative that Parliament, as co-legislator, budgetary co-authority and the only EU institution directly elected by universal suffrage, be involved as a key stakeholder in all debates on the Union's response to the crisis and the recovery that will follow.