

**Brussels, 26 March 2020
(OR. en)**

SN 17/20

Joint statement of the Members of the European Council

The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an unprecedented challenge for Europe and the whole world. It requires urgent, decisive, and comprehensive action at the EU, national, regional and local levels. We will do everything that is necessary to protect our citizens and overcome the crisis, while preserving our European values and way of life.

We recognise the burden these measures put on all our citizens and praise their sense of responsibility. We express our deepest sympathy with the victims of the pandemic and their families. We commend the dedication and tireless efforts of the healthcare professionals at the forefront of the outbreak and the contribution of those who provide essential services to the population.

We will cooperate with the international community and our external partners in combating the global pandemic.

We will continue to work along the five strands defined at our videoconferences on 10 and 17 March 2020 and do what is necessary to overcome the crisis.

Limiting the spread of the virus

1. All Member States have taken, based on advice from their national health authorities, decisive action to contain and slow down the spread of the virus. This effort is underpinned and supported by the guidelines of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the recommendations of the Commission COVID-19 Advisory Panel. Further guidelines will be issued as necessary, and we will continue to keep track of developments through the EU's Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism (IPCR), activated by the Croatian Presidency.
2. We have reinforced the control of our external borders by applying a coordinated temporary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU. We will evaluate the situation in due time and decide whether or not to prolong these measures.
3. Where temporary internal border controls have been introduced, we will ensure smooth border management for persons and goods and preserve the functioning of the Single Market, based on the Commission guidelines of 16 March 2020, in accordance with the Schengen Borders Code, and the Commission's guidance on the implementation of "green lanes". We will urgently address, with the assistance of the Commission, the remaining problems concerning EU citizens blocked at internal EU borders and prevented from returning to their home countries and cross-border and seasonal workers who have to be able to continue essential activities while avoiding further spread of the virus. The same applies to the supply of goods and essential services, whether by land, sea or air. We invite the Commission to report on the situation before our next videoconference.
4. We will resolutely counter disinformation with transparent, timely and fact-based communication on what we are doing and thus reinforce the resilience of our societies. The Commission and the High Representative will be fully involved and will report on our joint efforts to the Council.

Providing medical equipment

5. We call on the Commission to continue and accelerate its efforts to help ensuring urgent and adequate provision of medical equipment throughout the EU, which is the most acute priority. The Member States should closely cooperate in this respect and provide the Commission with timely and reliable data.
6. The Commission will, in cooperation with the industry, provide an overview of stocks, production and imports and take action to improve the situation. It will actively pursue its joint procurement initiatives for personal protective equipment, ventilators and testing supplies. We ask the Commission to explore ways to speed up procedures in that respect. The Commission will increase as needed the initial budget for the strategic rescEU stockpile of medical equipment, including for intensive care, and vaccines and therapeutics.
7. The adoption of the decision on the authorisation for export of personal protective equipment should lead to the full and effective lifting of all forms of internal bans or restrictions.
8. In the light of the WHO recommendations, it is a matter of urgency to increase testing capacities, and Member States will report to the Commission on the situation.

Promoting research

9. We will do everything possible to support research, coordinate efforts and seek synergies within the European scientific and research community so as to maximise the full potential of research across the EU. EUR 140 million have already been mobilised for 17 projects, including on vaccines. We will also work together with our key partners as set out in the recent G7 and G20 statements.
10. There is an urgent need to share scientific information and to collaborate both within the EU and worldwide on the challenge of developing a vaccine in the shortest possible time, and to make it available to all those in need, without any geographical barriers. We will increase and accelerate our support to European research teams and companies in this respect.

11. We welcome the initiatives taken by the Commission, the European Innovation Council and the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group to provide financial support for the clinical and public health response to the COVID-19 disease.

Tackling socio-economic consequences

12. We fully acknowledge the gravity of the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and will do everything necessary to meet this challenge in a spirit of solidarity.
13. We support the resolute action taken by the European Central Bank to ensure supportive financing conditions in all euro area countries.
14. We take note of the progress made by the Eurogroup. At this stage, we invite the Eurogroup to present proposals to us within two weeks. These proposals should take into account the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 shock affecting all our countries and our response will be stepped up, as necessary, with further action in an inclusive way, in light of developments, in order to deliver a comprehensive response.
15. Our Member States have taken extensive action to support their economies and alleviate social and employment problems. We will use EU instruments to support their action to the extent necessary.
16. Member States need flexibility to do everything that is necessary. The Commission's Temporary Framework for State aid measures to support the economy in the current COVID-19 outbreak constitutes a major step forward. The same applies to the unprecedented use of the general escape clause under the Stability and Growth Pact.

17. The Commission proposal for a Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative will provide EUR 37 billion of investment under cohesion policy to address the consequences of the crisis. With the proposed amendment to the EU Solidarity Fund, that Fund can also be used for public health emergency situations such as the COVID-19 outbreak. We look forward to the speedy adoption of these proposals. We welcome the Commission's readiness to further increase flexibility and leverage in the use of EU instruments.
18. We also commend the EIB Group's contribution in mobilising resources for bank guarantees to and investment in European companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, including through the use of the EU budget. We invite Finance ministers to explore without delay possibilities to scale up the EIB Group's coronavirus response overall.
19. We welcome the Commission guidelines on the screening of foreign direct investment and call on the Member States to take all necessary measures to protect strategic assets and technology from foreign investments that could threaten legitimate public policy objectives. This will contribute to the EU's strategic autonomy, during the crisis and afterwards.
20. The COVID-19 pandemic affects people and societies all over the world and will have a long term impact on global economy and trade. The EU commits to international cooperation and multilateral solutions in tackling the pandemic and its consequences. It will do its utmost to assist countries and communities to fight the COVID-19 crisis. It will also do its utmost to strengthen the sustainability of global integrated value and supply chains to adapt them as necessary and to alleviate the negative socio-economic impact of the crisis.

Citizens stranded in third countries

21. We will further step up our efforts to ensure that EU citizens stranded in third countries who want to go home can do so, with the active support of the High Representative and the Commission. The Commission will put forward an addendum to the border management guidelines to facilitate transit arrangements for repatriated EU citizens.

22. A Consular Task Force has been set up by the EEAS. Close coordination is ensured with the Commission and with the Member States. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) managed by the Commission assists the ongoing efforts for repatriations through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which should be provided with the necessary resources.

The urgency is presently on fighting the Coronavirus pandemic and its immediate consequences. We should however start to prepare the measures necessary to get back to a normal functioning of our societies and economies and to sustainable growth, integrating inter alia the green transition and the digital transformation, and drawing all lessons from the crisis. This will require a coordinated exit strategy, a comprehensive recovery plan and unprecedented investment. We invite the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council, in consultation with other institutions, especially the ECB, to start work on a Roadmap accompanied by an Action Plan to this end.

We must also draw all the lessons of the present crisis and start reflecting on the resilience of our societies when confronted with such events. In that respect, the time has come to put into place a more ambitious and wide-ranging crisis management system within the EU. We invite the Commission to make proposals in that respect.

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Enlargement

We endorse the Council conclusions of 25 March 2020 on enlargement and stabilisation and association process.

Earthquake in Croatia

We express our fullest sympathy with the Croatian Presidency and people, and stand ready to assist them in coping with the effects of the recent earthquake.

The situation at the EU's external borders

We express our concerns over the situation at the Greek-Turkish border and our full solidarity with Greece, as well as with Bulgaria and Cyprus and other Member States, which are similarly affected, including in efforts to manage the EU's external borders.
