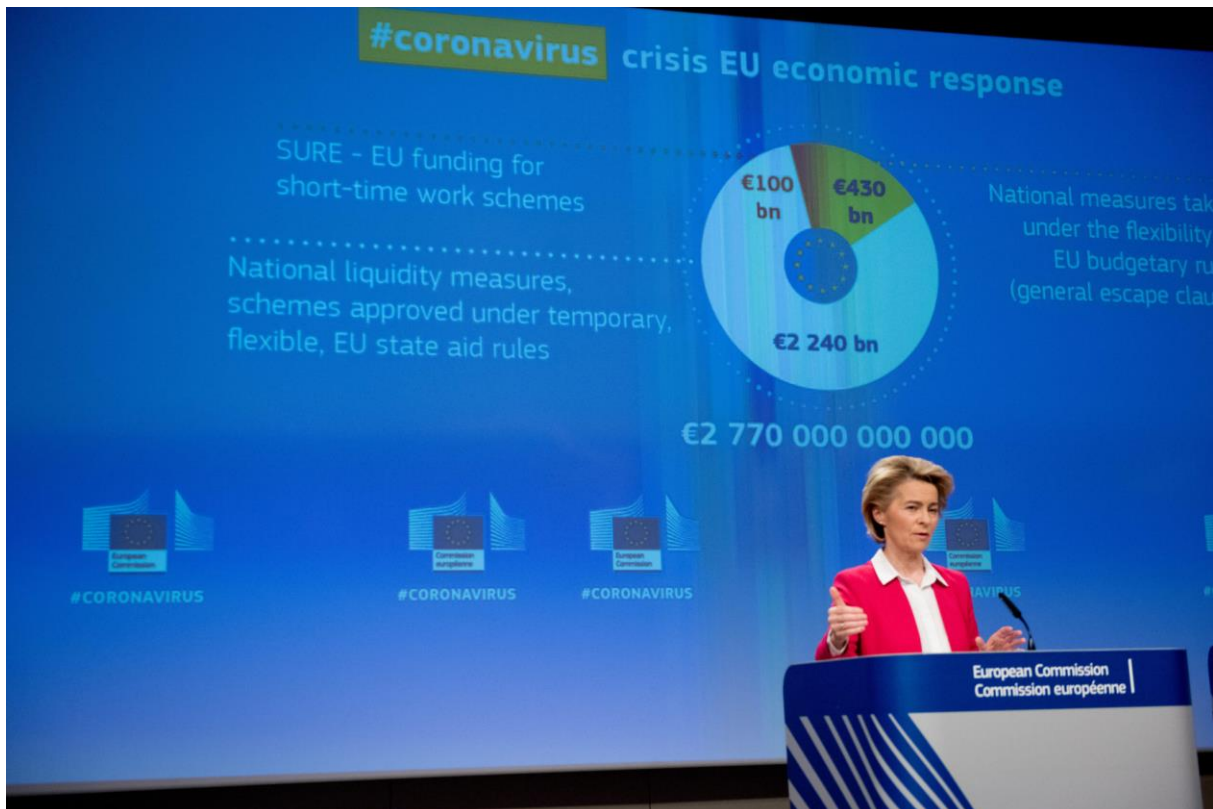


## Only together can Europeans overcome the coronavirus crisis



The COVID-19 crisis is a litmus test for the European Union. We represent a community of shared values, fundamental rights and common interests: let us build our destiny together, now!

The EU's political, economic, social, and health actions in response to this unprecedented crisis show that the European level is relevant and necessary to address such serious global challenges. Important steps have already been taken or announced by EU institutions, in particular the European Commission and the European Central Bank. Currently, EU actions depend on the willingness and powers of the member States, and so it should not be blamed for a lack of response in areas where it was not given competence. Faced with the stress of the coronavirus pandemic, tensions in Europe have resurfaced. Styles of dealing with the crisis at hand differ, and the economic fallout has unearthed the still-healing wounds of past crises. However, outdated politicking is not helping the citizens of Europe. They urgently expect future-oriented leadership and effective ways to deal with the current crisis.

Therefore, as Europeans, we call on EU institutions and Member States to move towards a stronger, collective response to the crisis, in the spirit of our shared interests and a common future.

Firstly, we need a collective response facing the health crisis. Formally, the EU does not have many official direct competencies in the field of healthcare. However, the EU does have the means to contribute to the establishment of common global structures for the future, promote health as common good, and remove the deleterious inequalities that have come to light in the current health crisis.

We therefore applaud and support upgrading the alignment of the EU and Member States with the World Health Organization EURO efforts to draw structural lessons from this crisis. We strongly support the various appeals and proposals to facilitate necessary research into the functioning of our various health care systems for the future. Namely to foster further cooperation with international and continental health agencies so as to draw key lessons on what should be coordinated at the European level. Moreover, taking into account that the crisis is global and has an international effect, the EU must continue to support ceasefires in international conflicts and flexibility in the application of international sanctions, and remember the action plan with Africa in view of the EU-Africa summit during the German Presidency.

Additionally, we recommend that the EU expand the work of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. We support the plea to have bodies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control for Health strengthened in order to amplify their actions in the field of epidemic prevention and surveillance. The Commission should be able to decide on binding and central rules for testing and the distribution of protective materials and medicine under the control of the European Parliament and Council and to support common research in the field of vaccines.

With regards to the current economic and social crisis, we call on the EU to help safeguard as much as possible the basic livelihood of people, the respect of the Rule of Law and the democratic structures of decision-making in the areas of fiscal, economic, social and foreign policies.

In addition, we call on all those concerned to step out of entrenched positions and use this exceptional moment to deal in substantial ways with our common financial future. There should be neither totems nor taboos in our European fight against the virus. We must embrace the emerging suggestions for greater flexibility within the EU budget in the case of emergencies, as well as more

financial resources for the EU itself. We must embrace the fast track development of adaptive mechanisms to deal with sudden shocks and crises, an ambitious five-year multiannual financial framework (instead of the current seven-year framework) as recently supported by the European Parliament, as well as mechanisms more in line with principles of democratic accountability.

Along the same lines and within the MFF, EU institutions should prepare and implement an ambitious comprehensive European recovery. This should entail revisiting existing and new financial tools. It is indeed important that the EU establish various aid programs to address the significant increase in unemployment caused by the epidemic. To do this, the aid that is being given and, notably the implementation of the European Commission's program on unemployment reinsurance, must continue to be reinforced.

Regarding the harsh measures restricting personal freedoms, we urge national governments to respect the rules of the Internal market and its freedoms. All regulations restricting human rights should be temporary, respecting the priority of legal security, limited to the need to fight the coronavirus, and should remain under democratic control of the European and national parliaments. An independent judiciary and free public opinion are paramount.

We are the citizens of European democracies in which divergences and compromises are expressed openly – unlike in other areas in the world. We are united in diversity, and take into consideration national, regional, and local concerns. As shown once again recently, the EU is always flexible when need be. At the same time, we wish to protect and enhance our democratic rights. We have come a long way and should therefore not regress into challenging basic Rule of Law or uncoordinated unilateral national measures, e.g. temporary re-establishment of internal border controls, shutting the door to information sharing between member States and European institutions or falling back into deficient communication with citizens.

All EU countries are affected by the ongoing crisis. Not a single country is to blame for its emergence, no one is able to win this battle on its own. Not a single Member State, leader, or political party has the solution for a more effective collective response. This is not the time for blame-games. This is the time for a focused effort, in a spirit of mutual understanding, building growing solidarity.

European peoples are carrying a heavy burden. Ordinary citizens everywhere are taking a heavy toll in lives lost and livelihoods disrupted. Citizens do organize and act, a massive solidarity is actually being displayed everywhere. We are therefore launching an urgent appeal to our national and European leaders to step up to

the occasion and not squander this moment. They must display the responsibility, gravitas and cohesion that this crisis requires. We need to move beyond the crisis and emerge stronger and wiser. This experience confirms the urgency and the necessity of the debate on the future of Europe in the upcoming European Conference. More than ever, we need to move together. Only then, as Europeans, will we win!

Signed,

- Linn Selle president of the EM Germany
  - Christoph Leitl president of the EM Austria
  - Velko Ivanov Acting Chairman of the EM Bulgaria
  - Christodoulos Pelagias president of the EM Cyprus
  - Stine Boss president of the EM Denmark
  - Francisco Aldecoa Luzarraga president of the EM Spain
  - Yves Bertoncini president of the EM France
  - Pier Virgilio Dastoli president of the EM Italy
  - Mark Zellenrath president of the EM Netherlands
  - Marcin Świącicki president of the EM Poland
  - Noelle O'Connell, president of the EM Ireland
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