



25 March 2020
Brussels

Dear President Ursula Von Der Leyen,
Dear President Charles Michel,

The death toll and the number of infections caused by the COVID-19 continue to raise daily and hospitals are facing severe shortages of medical equipment and supplies in an increasing number of countries and regions. Doctors, nurses and other health workers are fighting a daily war at the risk of their lives. The pandemic has already caused irreparable pain to thousands of families, and millions are now confined at home in fear for their health and for their future. The virus also attacks the economic and social foundations of our societies, as confinement broadens and deepens as the only possible response to the pandemic in the absence of an effective treatment or a vaccine. We are facing a common invisible enemy that knows no borders, that is already damaging the very essence of the EU and its four freedoms: the movement of goods, services, capital and people. The EU single market and the Schengen area are already at stake and unilateral responses further endanger the chances of success of fighting this pandemic.

An ineffective and insufficient political response to this crisis would destroy our economic prosperity and our social welfare for years, with dire political consequences. In order to avoid this, and ahead of this week's European Council meeting, we call for clear, consistent, closely coordinated European and national actions for the short and longer term, as set out by the **S&D Group in its Action Plan**¹.

First and foremost, we need to protect people's lives and their health. This is why we call for an **immediate EU-wide investment on research** and efficient sharing of data for an effective treatment and a potential vaccine against COVID-19, which must be accessible for all. We also need to ensure a **EU-wide stockpiling of essential medical equipment**, material and supplies, provision of test kits for regions which are highly affected, efficient and flexible joint procurement for medical supplies, strengthened public health agencies (ECDC, EMA) through the mobilisation of all public health tools available at European level.

The confinement of people and its impact on the economic activities also raise fears of disruption of the supply and distribution of essential goods within the Single Market. We need to **ensure reliable food supplies** during and beyond the immediate health crisis, safeguarding their continued production and **barrier-free transport across the Single Market**. This is why we call for better coordination and information sharing between Member States regarding border closures and restrictions, including green lanes. The duration of the confinement is unclear, which brings the need to urgently act **to bridge the digital divide**, in particular to support online learning and schooling in remote areas, as well as fiscal facilities for individuals and families to buy computers or tablets.

We should also guarantee that our citizens will be able to return to their job or allowed a minimum income during this difficult period. Nobody can be left behind with the choice of either protecting

¹ <https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/2020-03/sdgroupactionplancovid25march2020.pdf>

themselves and their loved ones or keeping their jobs and putting themselves and others at risk. This is why we call for the urgent implementation of an **Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme**. This measure should be combined with a **temporary European minimum income scheme**, in order to protect all types of workers, self-employed and small businesses, including in particular workers and self-employed in precarious forms of work and low-income families.

We are pleased that the Commission and the Council took on board our call for the suspension of European fiscal rules, to allow Member States to take strong action against the economic crisis. However, this will not be enough. If the 2008 financial crisis has taught us anything, it's that monetary policy alone cannot do the job, and that national measures are not sufficient. This is why we call for the **immediate creation of corona-bonds** guaranteed by a purchase programme of the European Central Bank. In order to avoid the interest rate spread of national public bonds, we need to **activate** as a matter of urgency **the European Stability Mechanism with a specific credit line** without additional macroeconomic conditionality.

While we are working for an effective European response, we cannot forget those refugees who are in the overcrowded hotspots and detention centres and do not have access to healthcare. They are particularly exposed and at risk. As the EU borders are closed, we should quickly assess the status of these migrants and refugees. Meanwhile preventive measures have to urgently be taken and therefore we call for the evacuation of the islands and border areas, starting with the most vulnerable (that is, those over 60 years of age, persons with pre-existing conditions, minors).

We hope that, sooner than later and once we stabilise the situation in the EU, we will support other countries affected by the COVID-19. The EU should vigorously support the call of the United Nations Secretary General for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world, where the public health systems are not enough robust, in order to focus on the "true fight of our lives" and to protect vulnerable civilians in conflict zones from the ravages of the pandemic.

This crisis must be a wake-up call for us and an opportunity to go back to the "community" spirit, going back to the essential goal of our Union: to bring people together in a transnational society that is inclusive and cohesive, based on solidarity. We know that our destinies are bound together and we have a chance to strengthen our shared resilience. The most urgent is to take care of our elderly and the most vulnerable. But let's not forget that these are historical times, and that the decisions we take today will shape the future of our societies and of the European Union. When we are about to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, let's not forget our goal: a sustainable society for its people and its environment. This is why our recovery strategy must lay the foundations of our European Green Deal, and provide a horizon of hope and solidarity for our young generations.

Best wishes,



Iratxe García Pérez

President

Group of the Alliance of Progressives and Democrats in the European Parliament