

Article – Rebuilding Europe after Covid-19: MEPs call for decisive action



In a discussion with Charles Michel, President of the European Council, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, MEPs said that solidarity and ambitious new solutions were needed to overcome the coronavirus outbreak and the resulting economic challenges.

Parliament President David Sassoli said in his opening remarks: “We want to exit this crisis stronger, more robust, in a better position to tackle the challenges of tomorrow... It will be of the utmost importance to coordinate the gradual relaxation of the lockdown as well as the path to exit and recovery... to avoid any backtracking or any devastating return to crisis.”

Most MEPs welcomed the plans announced by Von der Leyen to ensure massive investment with the aim of creating a more resilient, green and digital economy. Von der Leyen highlighted the crucial role of the EU long-term budget, describing it as “the mothership of our recovery” and spoke of the need for a new Marshall Plan, in reference to the programme that helped rebuild European countries’ economies after the Second World War.

Michel also urged joint action at EU level, saying: “Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring people together.”

On behalf of the EPP group, Esteban González Pons (Spain) underlined Parliament’s role: “While the plague is going on, the Parliament cannot close... The Parliament is essential in times of a pandemic. It is an extraordinary time for governments and Parliament is the hospital of democracy.” He pointed out mistakes in the initial response to the crisis: “We could have acted earlier, we could have acted more decisively, we could have actually acted together”, but added: “The European Union is the great hope that millions of Spaniards are looking to”.

Many of those speaking in Parliament’s plenary chamber or through a remote connection, underlined how critical the moment was. “The decisions we take now will determine Europe’s future: whether Europe will emerge stronger or whether citizens will lose their faith in the European project,” said S&D member Iratxe García Pérez (Spain). “The more decisive our action now, the less dramatic the economic and wider impact of this crisis will be tomorrow and the sooner we will be able to return to normal life.”

“These difficult times are a test for everybody,” said Renew Europe member Dacian Cioloş (Romania), calling for solidarity and cooperation in dealing with the health crisis. He said that Europe needed a Marshall Plan, a digital strategy and the Green Deal as well as “ambition to implement its strategy”.

ID member Marco Campomenosi (Italy) spoke of the frustration of people left to their own devices and wanting to get back to work. He noted that even before the crisis the EU had experienced years of low growth and argued that EU rules should be changed to boost the economy and ensure more self-sufficiency.

“We see that globalisation and wanting more and more are not always the answer, but come at the expense of resilience and capacity to deal with shocks,” said Greens/EFA member Philippe Lamberts (Belgium). He called for a rethink of how society was organised and a “new way of living, producing, moving, travelling”.

“We have to say loud and clear that Europe was completely unprepared in the coordination role that it had to play” in the crisis, said ECR member Raffaele Fitto (Italy). He called for measures to support hard-hit sectors such as tourism, transport and agriculture, as well as the removal of red tape and an overhaul of the EU budget.

GUE/NGL member Manon Aubry (France) blamed austerity measures implemented over the past decade for the reduction of health care capacity across Europe, and criticised the focus on containing public debt that restricts governments’ ability to deal with crises. “It is time to do away with taboos; it is the only way to deal with this pandemic today and with the climate issues tomorrow.”

Find out what [measures the EU has already taken](#) to combat the pandemic.