

Press release – COVID-19: MEPs call for a more unified EU response



Prior to a crucial urgency vote on the first batch of [measures](#) proposed by the Commission to help member states tackle the pandemic in an efficient and coordinated way, MEPs called for EU countries to collaborate and to keep internal borders open to allow medical equipment and goods to be delivered.

Respecting strict sanitary precautions, lead MEPs from all political groups gathered in a special session in the Brussels chamber on Thursday, with others following the debate from home. Thanks to [special procedures](#) put in place, all MEPs were able to cast their votes remotely: 687 MEPs participated in the first vote to approve the urgency procedure.

Click on the names to view individual statements by group leaders and the Commission.

Opening the debate, President [David Sassoli](#) reiterated that the Parliament would not cease to function despite the pandemic. “This is the only way we can serve people, serve our communities, and serve healthcare workers who are sacrificing themselves on the wards of our hospitals across Europe,” the President said. “The Parliament will continue to fulfil its democratic role”, he added.

Emphasizing the need for common action and preserving the single market,

European Commission President [Ursula von der Leyen](#) said, “When we needed an ‘all for one’ spirit, many gave an ‘only for me’ response. But things are now improving. The free movement of goods and services is the only way to get supplies to where they are needed. Putting barriers between us simply makes no sense! Europe’s citizens will remember the decisions and actions we take today.”

[Esteban González Pons](#) (EPP, ES) said: “We need the Europe that comes out on its balcony every evening to applaud health care workers”. He echoed the Commission president and called for resources to be channelled to local health care and for the free flow of medical equipment and goods to be guaranteed. He called for political systems to be maintained, investment into research, and solidarity among European leaders whose “European spirit is failing.”

“Today’s decisions are but a first step”, said [Javier Moreno Sánchez](#) (S&D, ES), stressing the need to also put forward measures such as an EU Marshall plan, funded by a new common European debt instrument, and a European unemployment fund, to help mitigate the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

“If Europe is about economic and monetary solidarity, health solidarity is even more necessary” said [Dominique Riquet](#) (Renew, FR). He supported steps against empty flights, and said well-organised supply chains are the means to stabilise Europe and fight the disease. “I want this aphorism to apply to Europe and its citizens: whatever does not kill us will make us stronger”, he concluded.

[Nicolas Bay](#) (ID, FR) criticised the EU response “We have a big challenge and you are absent. The European Commission has put Europeans at risk. The EU is not even capable of coordinating the measures taken by the member states. The COVID-19 crisis is a nail, perhaps the last one, in the coffin of an impotent bureaucracy”, he said.

Thanks and gratitude are not enough, said [Ska Keller](#) (Greens/EFA, DE) who called for help to be extended to the Western Balkans, too. The Greens call for financial help to people who have lost their income and, through “coronabonds”, to ensure the stability of EU countries. These extraordinary times “are not a pretext to undermine checks and balances”: governments must remain under the control of national parliaments, she added.

[Derk Jan Eppink](#) (ECR, NL) proposed a different pragmatic response to the crisis. “The new euro bonds or “coronabonds” would not be an effective way to revitalise the European economy. People urgently need cash. National central banks should instead provide credits at zero interest rates to our citizens and companies.”

“A protective Europe would look after its essential workers. Rather than applauding the carers, cashiers, the people on whom our lives depend, let us help them”, said [Manon Aubry](#) (GUE/NGL, FR), pleading for the production of health equipment to be shared and for a clear and coordinated strategy to lift the lockdown.

At the end of the session, Commission Vice-President [Maroš Šefčovič](#) answered questions raised by MEPs.

[***Catch up with the full debate***](#) *by VOD*