

PES Group Digest on the EU Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

8 May 2020

List of European decisions

Date	Number of cases and deaths ¹	European response
4 May	1 165 095 cases 136 367 deaths	<p>The European Commission published the latest package of exceptional measures to further support the agricultural and food sectors most affected by the coronavirus crisis.</p> <p>The European Commission registered €7.4 billion in pledges from donors worldwide during the Coronavirus Global Response pledging event, gathering funding to ensure the collaborative development and universal deployment of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines against coronavirus.</p> <p>The European Parliament Budget Committee voted on a request for a contingency plan to extend all EU programmes beyond 2020.</p>
5 May	1 174 394 cases 137 761 deaths	<p>EU ministers responsible for employment and social affairs discussed the national measures taken or foreseen to mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis on the labour markets and the economy.</p>

¹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The figures concern the countries of the European Economic Area (EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and the UK. <https://gap.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/COVID-19.html>

		<p>EU ministers responsible for telecommunications discussed the use of tracing apps in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the role of the digital sector in the post-COVID-19 recovery.</p>
6 May	1 186 111 cases 139 750 deaths	<p>The European Commission released the spring economic forecast, predicting that the EU economy will face an unprecedented annual decline of 7.4%.</p> <p>The EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit took place via video conference to discuss a new phase of close cooperation with the EU's partners.</p>
7 May	1 203 381 cases 141 999 deaths	<p>The European Commission approved all requests made by 18 Member States for support with the preparation of their territorial just transition plans, which each Member State will have to draw up to get access to funding from the Just Transition Mechanism.</p> <p>The European Commission put forward a comprehensive Action Plan to further strengthen the EU's fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.</p> <p>The European Commission issued a communication providing guidance on free movement of health professionals and minimum harmonisation of training in relation to COVID-19 emergency measures.</p>
8 May		<p>The European Committee of the Regions adopted its declaration on the response to the COVID-19 crisis.</p> <p>The Eurogroup ministers meet to discuss the economic situation of the euro area and prepare the ground for the recovery.</p>

The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the position of the PES Group

The European Committee of the Regions

The Committee adopted on 8 May a Declaration on “local and regional authorities as actors of the European response to the COVID-19 crisis”. At the initiative of the PES Group, the declaration included the following key points:

- The stress on the **social dimension** of the COVID-19 crisis,
- The need to introduce an ambitious EU **recovery fund** within the next Multiannual Financial Framework,
- The consideration of **Green Deal** objectives in the recovery plan,
- The **gender dimension** of the COVID-19 crisis,
- The **democratic dimension** and the opportunity that the crisis represents for a reform **of the EU’s governance**.

The outcome of the vote was:

- 173 Votes - 52% participation
- Yes: 133 - 76%
- No: 16 - 9.2%
- Abstention: 24 - 13.8%

→ Full text of the resolution:

<https://mempportal.cor.europa.eu/Handlers/ViewDoc.ashx?pdf=true&doc=COR-2020-01923-01-01-PRES-TRA-EN.docx>

New initiatives of the European Commission

The European Commission did not present the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal this week, as initially foreseen. The MFF may be presented on 13 May but the option of a further postponement by one week still remains open. The European Parliament puts all its focus on making the recovery closely linked to the MFF in order to have some parliamentary scrutiny for this big part of the future budget. If the European Parliament considers the new Commission proposal worth discussing, it is willing to quickly enter interinstitutional negotiations to reach an agreement, the June Council date still being plausible. If not, the European Parliament will plead for an extension of the 2014-2020 programmes with a top-up of some specific programmes to finance the economic recovery. However, the extension of programmes might prove problematic since it is not clear under which conditions they will be prolonged.

It is also important to note that the Commission published a new package of measures to further support the agricultural and food sectors affected by the coronavirus crisis. These include private storage aid for the dairy and meat sectors, the temporary authorisation to self-organise market measures by operators in hard hit sectors, and flexibility in the implementation of market support programmes. On top of these market measures, the Commission proposed to allow Member States to use rural development funds to compensate farmers and small agri-food businesses with amounts of up to €5 000 and €50 000 respectively.

- **“Q&A on the measures published to further support the agricultural and food sectors”**, European Commission, 4 May 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_798
- **“Coronavirus: EC adopts package of measures to further support the agri-food”**, AgriPress, 4 May 2020, <http://www.agripressworld.com/start/artikel/611736/en>

The European Parliament

Budget

On Monday 4 May, the Budget Committee of the European Parliament adopted a report (co-rapporteurs Jan Olbrycht/EPP and Margarida Marques/S&D), asking the European Commission to set up a contingency plan, due to the possible delay of the agreement on the next MFF, which might not enter into force on 1 January 2021. The Budget Committee requests that the Commission provides a safety net to protect the beneficiaries of the programmes by ensuring continuity of funding. Furthermore, it proposes targeted reinforcements and revisions of rules to address the immediate economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and support the recovery.

The Council of the European Union

On Tuesday 5 May, the EU employment and social affairs ministers presented different national measures they had already taken, as well as those they plan to introduce, such as temporary short-time work schemes and lay-offs measures, deferred or reduced tax payments of SMEs, and so on.

“It was agreed that additional efforts and even a stronger response will be needed to achieve full recovery”, said Josip Aladrovic, Minister of Labour and Pension System of Croatia. Nicholas Schmit (PES/Luxembourg), European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, stressed that it is important to urgently find an agreement on the new SURE instrument by 1 June. “The recovery [...] must be geared towards a more resilient, fair and sustainable Union, one that has people at its heart. EU health and safety standards must be fully respected. In these endeavours, the European Pillar of Social Rights remains our compass,” he added.

The European Commission has also brought forward its work on an Updated Youth Guarantee and an Child Guarantee as well as common standards on minimum income to guarantee that young people will be protected in the aftermath of the crisis.

The European progressive family

In addition, many other positions were adopted by our members and other PES family partners. Please find here some of them:

- **“S&Ds launch Recovery Plan for Europe to build a fair and sustainable future for all”**, 6 May,

<https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/sds-launch-recovery-plan-europe-build-fair-and-sustainable-future-all>

- **“The only way out is together”**, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira, *Euractiv*, 6 May 2020,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/opinion/the-only-way-out-is-together/>
- **“PES welcomes historic milestone for the Western Balkans and its future in Europe”**, 6 May,
<https://www.pes.eu/en/news-events/news/detail/PES-welcomes-historic-milestone-for-the-Western-Balkans-and-its-future-in-Europe/>

PES Group solidarity project

Last but not least, you are kindly reminded to join the PES Group project on solidarity initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic:

<https://pes.cor.europa.eu/covid-19-progressive-cities-and-regions-share-solidarity-projects>

So far, we have received a total of 35 contributions from 10 countries from PES Group members and also other local and regional progressive leaders.



If you wish to contribute, you can consult the online form available at this [link](#).

In addition, the PES Group hosted its first online event with our network of progressive young local leaders, moderated by our PES Group Vice-President Kata Tutto, from Budapest and with the participation of our member Fernando Medina, Mayor of Lisbon. You can watch it again here:

- <https://www.facebook.com/pescor.eu/videos/930336774066461/>

The fight against fake news

The European Union has been at the centre of a campaign of disinformation and fake news related to the COVID-19 in recent weeks. This week, a new report by NewsGuard confirmed that almost 40 Facebook pages across the European Union with large online followings continue to spread falsehoods and conspiracy theories about COVID-19.

→ *POLITICO Europe*,
<https://www.politico.eu/article/facebook-newsguard-misinformation-covid19-corona-virus/>

The following websites, constantly updated, can be helpful to you:

- **EUvsDISINFO**, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>
- **Scams related to COVID-19**,
+https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/consumers/enforcement-consumer-protection/scams-related-covid-19_en
- **COVID-19 foreign influence campaigns: Europe and the global battle of narratives**, European Parliament Research Service,
<https://epthinktank.eu/2020/04/07/covid-19-foreign-influence-campaigns-europe-and-the-global-battle-of-narratives/>
- **European Solidarity in Action**, European Commission,
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_20_563
- **European Commission Corona Virus Response**,
https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en
- **European Parliament Corona Virus Response**,
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/priorities/eu-response-to-coronavirus>
- **“10 things the EU is doing to fight the coronavirus”**, European Parliament,
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200327STO76004/10-things-the-eu-is-doing-to-fight-the-coronavirus>
- **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control**,
<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>
- **World Health Organisation**,
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Initiatives for cities and regions

We would like to highlight for you a few events taking place to mark the 9th of May, Europe Day.

S&D Group in the European Parliament

The S&D will be hosting an event on 8 May, this evening at 18:00, to debate some of the big questions facing the EU today in the midst of this unprecedented pandemic, with S&D Group President Iratxe García, European Parliament President David Sassoli, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, Vice-Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and our member Christophe Clergeau, Member of the Pays-de-la-Loire Regional Council and French Socialist Party Secretary for European Affairs.

→ <https://www.facebook.com/events/2619505455035750>

Foundation for European Progressive Studies

FEPS will also host an online event to launch their latest report “What is the European Dream?” at 11 AM on Saturday, 9 May.

→ <https://www.feps-europe.eu/events/upcoming-events/626-what-is-the-european-dream-feps-future-of-europe-debate-series.html>

The European Committee of the Regions

This web-conference will see the participation of members of the European Committee of the Regions, #CohesionAlliance members, other selected politicians and VIP guests including Commissioner Elisa Ferreira and European Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, in charge of Democracy and Demography.

The event will take place on 9 May, from 10:00 to 13:00 and it will be streamed on the website of the Committee.

→ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Pages/virtual-open-day-regions-and-cities-against-covid-19.aspx>

Other Europe Day events

Don't forget the State of the Union event organised by the European University Institute in Florence:

- **State of the Union, 6-8 May, Florence**
<https://stateoftheunion.eui.eu/>

And also the great initiative by the European Parliament:

- **European Parliament, 9 May**
<https://www.facebook.com/events/236198284319637/>

New European Commission initiative

Moreover, we would like to share with you this new website that the European Commission has created to bring together under one link all initiatives/ information related to the cultural and creative sectors in the EU in response to the COVID crisis.

→ <https://creativesunite.eu/>

New UN-Habitat initiative

Our partner UN-Habitat launched the initiative *Local2030 Spotlight Series*. Within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), local and regional authorities around the world are invited to prepare and share 2-minute video contributions highlighting their perspectives on the main challenges and innovative solutions developed at the local level to fight the COVID-19 outbreak. Each week, there is a different theme.

If you wish to contribute, please get in touch with our Press and Communications Adviser, monica.tiberi@cor.europa.eu.

Useful links to monitor

Please find here a list of sources that we have already shared. All these organisations are regularly publishing updates and online events, so we recommend you to check their websites:

- **Bloomberg Foundation**
<https://cities4health.org/>
<https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/resources-sessions>
- **C40**
https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/cities-and-coronavirus-covid-19?language=en_US&tabset-5cf81=42fb1
https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Cities-and-Coronavirus-COVID-19?language=en_US
- **European Commission's Intelligent Cities**
<https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/covid-19-webinars>
- **OECD**
<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>
- **United Cities and Local Governments**
<https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>

Useful readings

Please find below a series of useful articles, published by various think tanks and organisations:

- **“Where Is the Local News About COVID-19?”**, Project Syndicate, 29 April 2020, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/dearth-of-covid19-local-news-by-jan-werner-mueller-2020-04>
- **“Building a Post-Pandemic World Will Not Be Easy”**, Bruegel, 30 April 2020, <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/04/building-a-post-pandemic-world-will-not-be-easy/>
- **“SHOWING TRUE ILLIBERAL COLOURS. Rule of law vs Orbán’s pandemic politics?”**, Centre for European Policy Studies, 30 April 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/showing-true-illiberal-colours/>
- **“Covid-19: European Responses, a complete picture”**, Robert Schuman Foundation, 5 May 2020, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/actualites/covid19-26032020-en.pdf>
- **“THE GREAT LOCKDOWN. Was it worth it?”**, Centre for European Policy Studies, 5 May 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/the-great-lockdown/>
- **“Schuman at seventy”**, European Policy Centre, 6 May 2020, <http://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Schuman-at-seventy~32d994>
- **“EU support for artists and the cultural and creative sector during the coronavirus crisis”**, European Parliament Research Service, 6 May 2020, <https://epthinktank.eu/2020/05/06/eu-support-for-artists-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sector-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>
- **“4 takeaways from EU’s virtual Balkan Summit”**, Politico Europe, 7 May 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/4-takeaways-from-eus-virtual-balkan-summit/?fbclid=IwAR1DIIs9flxAXY8hogzWJWWJMimfdb_pFVKV5CdDZ3749H2UgHk8m_2dX7p8
- **“Europe faces ‘recession of historic proportions’”**, Politico Europe, 6 June 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eurozone-growth-employment-dive-in-pandemic-fallout/>
- **“Coronavirus threatens future of eurozone, Brussels warns”**, The Guardian, 6 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/06/coronavirus-threatens-future-eurozone-brussels-economic-social-divisions-pandemic>