

Outcome of the video-conference call of EU Heads of State or Government on 10 March 2020

Given the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak and the potential EU-wide ramifications, Heads of State or Government of the 27 EU Member States welcomed the initiative to hold a special meeting by video-conference on 10 March 2020. European Council President Charles Michel expressed his sympathy for all those citizens affected by the disease and, in particular, for Italy, the country most affected so far. The Member States discussed the COVID-19 outbreak and agreed on four lines of action to contain the spread of the disease. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde, the President of the Eurogroup, Mario Centeno, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, also took part in the discussion.

The format of the meeting was exceptional in several aspects. It is noteworthy that, for the first time, a video-conference call, bringing all EU Heads of State or Government together, as well as many representatives from other institutions, was organised in such a formal manner. The meeting was followed by a regular press conference, and resulted in the President of the European Council releasing its conclusions. Given the very productive outcome of the meeting, it is possible that such a format could be used more frequently in the future.

Following the discussion, EU leaders identified [four priorities](#): 1) Limiting the spread of the virus; 2) Provision of medical equipment; 3) Promotion of research; and 4) Tackling the socio-economic consequences. Member States agreed that all measures taken should be based on science and be proportionate, and that all relevant information would be shared through [existing coordination mechanisms](#). It will be essential that medical equipment be made available, and the European Commission will pursue joint public procurement, prioritising protective equipment and respiratory devices. Member States called for more research, including towards the development of a vaccine. The Commission has already [mobilised](#) €140 million of public and private funding for research on vaccines, diagnosis and treatment. Moreover, it will assemble a team of epidemiologists and virologists from different Member States to agree guidelines to apply at European level.

The Heads of State or Government agreed to act in a coordinated manner to address the socio-economic impact of the virus outbreak on specific affected sectors and employees, in particular, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In this context, a flexible application of EU rules on state aid and the Stability and Growth Pact would be needed. The Commission will propose concrete measures before the Eurogroup meeting on 16 March 2020. Lastly, the Commission will bring forward a Corona Response Investment Initiative to support health systems, SMEs, the labour market and other vulnerable sectors. The Commission [intends](#) to make €7.5 billion in liquidity available in the coming weeks, which could be increased to €25 billion.

Regarding the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the aviation industry, legislation [will be proposed](#) to temporarily loosen the airport slot usage obligations on airlines under EU law. Under the [EU Airport Slots Regulation \(EEC 95/93\)](#), airlines are required to use 80 % of their allocated slots, or face losing their right to such slots in future seasons. The European Council will follow up on all of these issues during its meeting on 26-27 March 2020.