

Long-term budget: EU needs proper funding to tackle crises, say MEPs



Charles Michel during the debate in plenary

The EU should have the financial means to tackle challenges such as coronavirus or migration, said MEPs in a plenary debate on the EU long-term budget.

The discussion in [Parliament](#) on 10 March focused on the proposal of European Council President Charles Michel for the size and structure of the EU's [long-term budget](#) that failed to gain approval by EU heads of state and government at their summit on 20-21 February.

Michel said he would continue consultations with member states “to assess when it is possible to come back to a new summit” and he also committed to keeping direct contact with Parliament about all developments.

Most MEPs criticised his proposal as lacking ambition and pointed out current challenges show Europe should have a budget that allows it to act and live up to people's expectations.

[José Manuel Fernandes](#) (EPP, Portugal), who is a member of Parliament's negotiating team on the long-term budget, said: "It is perhaps a good thing that the Council has not reached an agreement. The European Parliament could not have approved an agreement that would go against the interests of European citizens. EU leaders are coming up with fine words and goals, but when it comes to backing those targets with the financial resources, they don't do so."

S&D group leader [Iratxe García Pérez](#) (Spain) said: "It is preferable to have no agreement [on the EU budget] rather than a bad agreement."

The capacity to act

MEPs said current challenges show the EU has to have the financial capacity to provide common solutions.

Renew Europe leader [Dacian Cioloş](#) (Romania) said the long-term budget can mitigate the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on business: "The European budget needs to play its role as an investment lever to get the economy going again." Referring to the crisis on the Greek-Turkish border, he said: "Our border security and solidarity policy means that [EU border agency] Frontex needs appropriate resources and a budget that allows for real solidarity on the ground."

Budgets committee chair [Johan Van Overtveldt](#) (ECR, Belgium) argued against cuts in defence and research programmes: "If there is one area where the EU needs to be investing, it is in our shared future. We really need to focus on innovation."

[Margarida Marques](#) (S&D, Portugal), who is also a member of the Parliament's negotiating team, said: "Our response, faced with the climate challenge, demographic challenge, digital challenge and international challenge has to be more Europe: a Europe that can solve the crisis at our borders, that can find a solution to the coronavirus".

She added that the EU should be prepared to respond to crises that cannot be foreseen: "In the next seven years we must be aware that new unexpected challenges will also arise and Europe cannot say as in 2007-2008 that we are not ready."

[Rasmus Andresen](#) (Greens/EFA, Germany), another member of Parliament's negotiating team, noted that the situation is serious and EU countries should make efforts to find an agreement: "We are faced with a new economic crisis and all these nationalistic battles cannot be fought out."

Broken promises

[Siegfried Mureşan](#) (EPP, Romania) reminded that in June 2019 the European Council adopted a [strategic agenda](#) committing to effective control of external borders, strengthening the single market and achieving digital sovereignty. Yet the proposal of Council president Michel foresees double-digit percentage cuts to the EU's border guard agency, internal security, single market and Digital Europe programmes. "The proposal of Charles Michel does not respect the promises of the European Council. Our answer should be no."

[Jens Geier](#) (S&D, Germany) also pointed out inconsistencies in EU leaders' messages on Europe: "For years, we have been seeing the same situation. On Sunday, in speeches [EU leaders] ask for more border protection and more to be spent on climate, on common defence policy and so on. On Monday, member states aren't prepared to stump up the money. By Tuesday, it's all about how bad things are given the EU can't solve the problems."