



[Check Against Delivery]

Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the EU coordinated action to combat the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences

Brussels, 16 April 2020

Dear President,
Honourable Members,

There are no words that can do justice to Europe's pain or to all those suffering across the world.

We think and we pray for all of the families in mourning. And we promise to each other that we will tell their stories and honour their lives and their legacies.

We will remember them all.

We will remember Julie, the French teenager with her whole life ahead of her, Jan, the veteran Czech historian who always fought for what he believed in, and Gino, the Italian doctor who came out of retirement to save lives.

We will remember the Suzanne's incredible gesture to leave her ventilator to someone younger than her in Belgium, and the image of Francis who waved goodbye to his brother through a hospital window in Ireland.

We will remember the new Polish mother who will not see her child grow up and the young Spanish football coach who will never see his dream come true.

We will remember them all.

The mothers, the fathers, the sisters and brothers. The young and the old from the north or the south, the east or the west. The friends and the colleagues, the neighbours from nearby and the strangers from far away. Those with stories to tell and places to be. Those whose shoulder we cry on and whose love we rely on.

Each and every one of those thousands of stories breaks off a little piece of our heart.

But they also make our resolve that much stronger to ensure that Europe does everything it can to save every life it can.

Honourable Members,

You cannot overcome a pandemic of this speed or this scale without the truth. The truth about everything: the numbers, the science, the outlook – but also about our own actions.

Yes, it is true that no one was really ready for this. It is also true that too many were not there on time when Italy needed a helping hand at the very beginning.

And yes, for that, it is right that Europe as a whole offers a heartfelt apology.

But saying sorry only counts for something if it changes behaviour.

The truth is that it did not take long before everyone realised that we must protect each other to protect ourselves.

And the truth is too that Europe has now become the world's beating heart of solidarity.

The real Europe is standing up, the one that is there for each other when it is needed the most.

The one where paramedics from Poland and doctors from Romania save lives in Italy. Where ventilators from Germany provide a lifeline in Spain. Where hospitals in Czechia treat the sick from France. And where patients from Bergamo are flown to clinics in Bonn.

We have seen medical supplies go from Lithuania to Spain and respirators go from Denmark to Italy. In fact, we have seen every piece of equipment go in every direction across Europe, from whoever can spare it to whoever that needs it.

This makes me proud to be European.

Of course, there are still some who want to point fingers or deflect blame. And there are others who would rather talk like populists than tell unpopular truths.

To this, I say stop.

Stop and have the courage to tell the truth.

Have the courage to stand up for Europe. Because this Union of ours will get us through. But it will only be as strong tomorrow as we make it today.

And if you need inspiration, just look at the way the people of Europe are standing together - with empathy, humility and humanity.

I pay tribute to them all. To the delivery drivers and the food suppliers. The shopkeepers, the factory packers and the balcony clappers. The companies changing their production lines to make the supplies we urgently need.

I pay tribute to the Portuguese volunteers sewing masks for their neighbours or the seven-year-old Greek pianist who composed an "isolation waltz" to keep people going.

Above all else I thank and I pay tribute to our heroes: the medics, nurses and careworkers. They are the ones with bruises on their faces and tragic images in their hearts and minds. The ones holding the hands of the sick as softly and as lovingly as the families that cannot be there.

They are the ones saving our lives and saving our honour.

The ones we must protect so they can protect us all.

And this is exactly what we are fully focused on.

It is why we have created a common stockpile of medical equipment and invested in research for treatments and vaccines.

It is why we have organised joint procurements for the most urgent supplies on the world market and set up a team of experts from across Europe to share the best knowledge to save lives.

It is why we have waived customs duties and VAT on the import of medical devices from third countries.

And it is why earlier this month we made a simple but big promise: We will use every available euro we have - in every way we can - to save lives and protect livelihoods of Europeans.

In this spirit, we proposed to direct all our remaining budget for the year into an emergency instrument. This will allow almost 3 billion euro to go directly to where it needs to go - from securing new ventilators and protective gear, to scaling up testing efforts and providing medical assistance to the most vulnerable, including those in refugee camps.

To back that up, we are proposing to allow every available euro of European Structural and Investment Funds to be used on the response to the Coronavirus. This means full flexibility: they can be moved between regions. And they can be used where they are needed most, irrespective of the usual requirements on co-financing, on policy objective or ceilings.

With the package this House will vote on today, Europe is putting everything it has into doing everything it can.

And the same principle applies to protecting people's livelihoods.

Europe has had economic crises before. But we have never had an economic shutdown like this.

Nobody is to blame and everybody will need support. We need unprecedented measures to do this and to make sure our economy is ready to bounce forward as soon as it can.

And here again, the truth matters.

Europe has done more in the last four weeks than it did in the first four years of the last crisis.

We have made our state aid rules more flexible than ever. In the last few days alone, we have approved schemes that will provide 1 billion euro to Croatian businesses, 1.2 billion for Greek SMEs or 20 million to Portuguese fishermen. There are many more examples I could pick, from Latvia and Estonia to Belgium or Sweden.

For the first time in our history, we triggered the full flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact. Along with bold measures taken by the European Central Bank, this provides unprecedented fiscal and

financial firepower.

And last week's decisions by EU finance ministers mean a further 500 billion euros will be available to all of those who need it to.

As part of this, I urge all Member States to make the most of SURE – the new scheme proposed by the Commission to protect Europeans against the risk of unemployment. It will provide €100 billion to help governments make up the difference if your employer has to reduce your hours - or if you are self-employed and need support.

The beauty of SURE is two-fold. First, it will help those in need to pay their rent, bills or food and keep other businesses alive in the process. And second, it is the definition of European solidarity. The Member States that can, will put up guarantees so others can support the hardest hit in their countries.

As a result of all of this action, Europe's collective response is well above 3 trillion euros. This is the most impressive response anywhere in the world.

But we know we will need more. A lot more. Because this will be a long haul and the world of tomorrow will look very different from that of yesterday.

Honourable Members,

I am convinced that Europe can shape this new world if it works together and rediscovers its pioneering spirit.

And for this, I want to cite a sentence from the Ventotene Manifesto – written by two of Italy and Europe's greatest visionaries: Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, one of our founding fathers.

Writing from their prison on a remote island, at the height of the war, when all hope of a united Europe seemed lost, they gave us these words of confidence:

The moment has arrived in which we must know how to discard old burdens, how to be ready for the new world that is coming, that will be so different from what we have imagined.

Dear Friends, this moment has arrived once again.

The moment to put behind us the old divisions, disputes and recriminations. To come out of our entrenched positions.

The moment to be ready for that new world. To use all the power of our common spirit and the strength of our shared purpose.

The starting point for this must be making our economies, societies and way of life more sustainable and resilient.

Finding the answers in this new world will require courage, trust and solidarity.

And it will need massive investment to jumpstart our economies.

We need a Marshall Plan for Europe's recovery and it needs to be put in place immediately.

There is only one instrument we have that is trusted by all Member States, which is already in place and can deliver quickly. It is transparent and it is time tested as an instrument for cohesion, convergence and investment.

And that instrument is the European budget.

The European budget will be the mothership of our recovery.

And for that reason, the next seven year budget must be different to what we had imagined, just as Spinelli said.

We will use the power of the whole European budget to leverage the huge amount of investment we need to rebuild the Single Market after Corona.

We will frontload it so we can power that investment in those crucial first years of recovery.

Because this crisis is different from any other one we have known. It is severely hitting completely healthy companies because public life has shutdown.

This is why we will need innovative solutions and more headroom in the MFF to unlock massive public and private investment. This will kick-start our economies and drive our recovery towards a more resilient, green and digital Europe.

By that, we not only support but we also reshape our industries and services towards a new reality.

It will mean investing in our digital technologies, infrastructure and in innovation such as 3D printing to help us to be more independent and make the most of new opportunities.

And it also means doubling down on our growth strategy by investing in the European Green Deal. As the global recovery picks up, global warming will not slow down. First-mover advantage will count double and finding the right projects to invest in will be key.

A more modern and circular economy will make us less dependent and boost our resilience. This is the lesson we need to learn from this crisis.

Investing in large scale renovation, renewables, clean transport, sustainable food and nature restoration will be even more important than before. This is not only good for our economies, it is not only good for our environment but it reduces dependency by shortening and diversifying supply chains.

We also need to keep another reality in mind.

While the crisis is symmetric, the recovery will not be. Because not only the virus hits but the economic shock too. Some regions will bounce back and others will have a harder time. And therefore, cohesion and convergence will be more important than ever.

The Single Market and cohesion policy are the two sides of the same coin. You need both to ensure prosperity across the whole EU.

Honourable Members,

This is the Europe that I believe can emerge from this crisis.

One that does everything it can to protect lives and livelihoods. One that is open to the world but can take care of itself. One that is more resilient, green and digital and that invests in its future together.

This is the path to recovery. It will be a long road and the whole world will be trying to find its way.

This crisis will likely redefine our politics, our geopolitics and possibly globalisation itself. And in this new world Europe will need to stick together through thick and thin.

And as I look around our Union – and I see all that humanity and that ingenuity - I know that we can and we will do just that.

Honourable Members,

They say a strong soul shines bright after every storm.

If we all stand up for Europe today - with courage, trust and solidarity - I know that tomorrow Europe's soul will shine brighter than ever before.

Long live Europe.

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