



Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová
Member of the European Parliament

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium

16 March 2020

Subject: Urgent need for the coordinated response to the coronavirus

Dear Mrs President,

As the Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and a Member of the European Parliament, I would like to draw your attention to the current lack of coordinated response to the coronavirus among the Member States and its damaging long-term consequences to our citizens. The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has spread rapidly to different regions in Europe, which prompted different courses of action from national governments, despite some efforts to coordinate a common EU response.

I am fully aware that the role of the European Commission is mainly to support, synchronize and provide Member States with recommendations. However, we are witnessing largely uncoordinated, piecemeal or even contradictory measures on national level, which will ultimately undermine our common efforts to fight the outbreak. According to the WHO, the Europe has become the epicentre of the pandemic.

Some Member States, such as Germany, France or Czech Republic have blocked the export of anti-virus gear. Some of them reintroduced border controls or closed border for non-nationals. Several EU countries have introduced strict and needed restrictions; partial travel bans, shut down schools or banned large gatherings across Europe. Unfortunately, some Member States have done too little, too late.

There are already major and worrying differences between eastern and western countries and we can already see the tragic consequences of delayed protective measures in Italy, which represents about 58 percent of EU's cases - followed by Spain, Germany and France. Italy has already lost 1,809 of its citizens due to the coronavirus outbreak; the death toll has increased by 25% from Sunday. Deaths in Spain have more than doubled in a day, to 288, with the number of infections near 8,000.

Despite this development, some Member States have just started with protective measures and fail to implement big scale restrictions to effectively contain the spread of coronavirus and improvise their way on a daily basis. In France, politicians are still wondering if the second round of municipal elections should be held next Sunday.

Following the latest Council and Commission meetings, there have been several promises of collective response for this unprecedented virus outbreak. Yet, Member States continue to act in an uncoordinated and unilateral manner, some of them without consistent national approach, which is leading to continued spread of coronavirus, amplified with our interconnected economies and high mobility of EU citizens.

The Commission already said they would use all the instruments at its disposal to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. However, there seems to be a growing discrepancy between promised coordinated EU response and actual policies among Member States, which have its origin in the lack of unified guidelines from the Commission.

The coronavirus COVID-19 will very likely push the European economy into recession this year. The rebound next year will depend on a bold response from Member States and I am very concerned that currently proposed economic will not have any effect without efficiently mitigating its spread. The failure to act now on EU level will affect mostly the small, export-oriented economies.

It is fair to assume that what is happening in Italy is going to be reproduced in Spain, France and Germany over the next weeks and delay in EU coordinated response will accordingly cause deepening of the crisis, leading to even higher socio-economic costs. Concern is growing for tens of thousands of cross-border workers, who travel between EU states and are facing entry and exit restrictions that could see them unable to work or return home to their families. The fundamental freedoms within the EU will not be ever restored unless all the Member States contain the virus successfully.

Solidarity has been in short supply, as countries restricted the export of medical supplies, in violation of the EU Single Market. The member states have divergent health system capacity, and some are struggling with finding the resources to deal with the pandemic. The situation in Italy shows that patients' lives are endangered when hospitals are overwhelmed.

I believe that all EU citizens deserve to have the same level of protection and without the common EU response and rigorous guidance of the European Commission; we will fail to protect them. This, in turn, will fuel the rise of Eurosceptic nationalists and extremists calling into question the whole project of European Union, supposedly based on solidarity and cooperation.

Taking all the above into consideration, I would like to call upon the Commission to:

- Take immediate action and adopt without delay the EU common guidelines on the application of countermeasures to minimise the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus in the population, based on scientific evidence from ECDC and WHO and recommendations and supervise their implementation in the Member States, using all political and economic tools at disposal.
- Facilitate effective cooperation between the Member States and strongly invite them to adopt the identical and consistent countermeasures to COVID-19, taking into consideration the current dynamics of the epidemiological situation.
- Assess all the possibilities under the current legal framework, such as Decision No 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health, to step up the cooperation and solidarity among the Member States, and condemn all unilateral and contradictory measures taken on the national level.

Further, the Commission should take immediate action, in cooperation with Member States and Council, to:

- Secure large-scale high-throughput testing of COVID 19 across Europe by helping individual countries obtain necessary equipment if their testing capacity is insufficient. The ability to test on a scale in the tens of millions is critical in saving lives, slowing down the epidemic and last, but not least, help restart the active economy since people can not return to work without being properly tested.
- Reconsider the recent proposal of the EU to mobilize €140 million of public and private funding for promising research on vaccines, diagnosis and treatment as insufficient. In light of recent crises, the funding should be dramatically increased.

- Map the availability of crucial medical supplies and provide this information to individual countries, as the EU has imposed limits on exports of medical equipment outside its borders. The EU should call for solidarity among member countries with nations that are better equipped helping those that are lacking specific pieces of equipment or important medical supplies.

Even though the European Commission is now taking stock of the available protective equipment and respiratory devices as well as their production and distribution capacity, the items monitored should be expanded to include the entire health sector. The EU should create a register of available goods, resources and supplies so member countries could effectively solve the problems with acute shortages.

- Consider possible temporary ban on entry to the 26-state Schengen passport-free travel zone to cover all non-essential visits from third countries, in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus across Europe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová', written in a cursive style.

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