

Article – State of the EU: MEPs debate measures to improve Europe



MEPs' reactions

MEPs were broadly supportive of many of the new initiatives announces, but also keen to highlight areas where the EU should focus on.

Manfred Weber (EPP, Germany) said job creation should be a priority: “Take Italy, 40% of the young people in Italy are still unemployed. And we can never accept another lost generation in today’s European Union.” He added: “You can spend the money of the recovery fund only once and our priority is the future of Europe’s young generation.” Weber also underlined the need for the EU to speak with one voice on foreign matters. Regarding Belarus, he said: “If we are credible, let the people out in the streets in Minsk see that Europe is on their side.”

S&D chair Iratxe García Pérez (Spain) talked about the different challenges facing Europe. Arguing in favour of a financial transactions tax, she said: “It is only in this way that we will be able to invest in ecological transitions and social inclusion without leaving anyone behind.” She was pleased with the new 2030 target of an emissions reduction but said we should not forget that “people are part of this transitions, so we need a strategy to counter poverty, including child poverty and including a minimum wage,” which von der Leyen mentioned in her speech. She called for support for the

cultural sector and the creation of an European cultural platform to “allow young people to collaborate and strengthened European cultural fabric”.

Dacian Cioloş (Renew, Romania) said Europe has made considerable progress in recent months: “There is no doubt that the recovery plan is a historic step forward and it embodies the power of the Union and our ability to overcome crises together.” However, he emphasised the need to respect the rule of law as a key principle when it comes to funds, to maintain people’s trust: “[...] the Union’s financial interests must be protected from corruption and conflicts of interest.” He praised the Commissions’ reaction to the Parliament’s call to impact assessment regarding climate legislation, and its digital plans.

Nicolas Bay (ID, France) lamented the lack of market protection measures in Europe during the height of the health crisis, as well as the strict environmental rules weakening the competitiveness of European companies: “This does not help the independence and prosperity of European future, rather it will make Europe ever more fragile on the world stage.”

Ska Keller (Greens/EFA, Germany) criticised the conditions for accepting migrants at EU’s external borders. “It is a very shameful state we are in [...] and it is our collective responsibility as Europeans,” she said, urging the Commission to take up the fight with member states for adequate conditions, “to make it a top priority to help people in need and not to give in to this disastrous state we’re in”. She welcomed the proposed target of 55% reductions in emissions by 2030. “The climate cannot be negotiated with so we’d better move fast”.

Ryszard Antoni Legutko (ECR, Poland) said that the last decade has been turbulent for the EU, and that it is in a worse shape today than it was ten years ago. “Every year over the last decade, we have heard from every Commission President that a radiant future is awaiting us and the days of EU glory are just around the corner, providing of course that the European Commission and the European institutions receive more competences...Fewer and fewer people across Europe take this message seriously.”

Manon Aubry (France), co-chair of the GUE/NGL Group, criticised the speech for not mentioning the crisis of solidarity that exists in the EU, exemplified by tax havens, or issues relating to the rule of law in Poland and Hungary. She also criticised the 55% objective of reducing climate emissions as not enough. “In order to tackle the challenges that face us, we have to change everything. Our only focus should be the environment and social aspects,” she said and called for fiscal justice, tax justice and the end of tax havens in Europe.

Reacting to what MEPs has said, von der Leyen called for a “constructive approach towards migration”. “Every year about two million people do come to Europe and 140,000 refugees, we should be able to manage that.” She said the Commission would be putting forward a legislative proposal next week. On the rule of law, she said the Commission was taking “the most systematic and the most comprehensive approach in our history”.