

Press release – EU COVID-19 recovery plan must be green and ambitious, say MEPs



On Tuesday, Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety had an exchange of views with Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the Commission, on the European Green Deal and on the European Climate Law.

Last week, in its [resolution](#) on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, Parliament called on the Commission to propose a recovery and reconstruction package that "should have at its core the Green Deal and the digital transformation in order to kick start the economy."

Mr. Timmermans agreed and added that the European Green Deal is not a luxury, but a lifeline to get out of the corona virus crisis. Pan-European answers are needed and a green recovery is not only possible but crucial, as Europe would lose out twice if we mobilise investment to restore the old economy before we make it green and sustainable.

While all MEPs agreed that solving the health crisis is the immediate priority, many MEPs underlined the need to keep the timetable on important parts of the European Green Deal. Mr. Timmermans said the timetable for the EU Climate Law is unchanged, with a revised reduction target proposal for 2030 foreseen for September, while the EU biodiversity strategy and the farm-to-fork strategy remain important priorities, but would have to be delayed "a few weeks, but not months".

Background

On 28 November 2019, the European Parliament [declared a climate emergency](#) in Europe and globally. MEPs also asked for all relevant EU legislative and

budgetary proposals to be fully aligned with the objective of limiting global warming to under 1.5 °C.

The Commission proposed the [European Green Deal](#) on 11 December 2019. This was followed up with a proposal for an [EU Climate Law](#) on 4 March 2020 to ensure a climate-neutral European Union by 2050. The Climate Law has to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers through the ordinary legislative procedure.

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[Press release – Tourism in COVID-19 crisis: MEPs demand clear action plan to help the sector](#)



MEPs reiterated, in a debate with Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton, that the tourism sector needs more support in the ongoing COVID-19 crisis through specific measures, funding, increased EU-level coordination and a targeted roadmap. The demand for a sector-specific recovery plan and strategy was echoed across the political spectrum.

Protecting the tourism sector

Commissioner Breton acknowledged that tourism was the first sector hit by the coronavirus and it is likely to be the slowest to recover from the crisis. “We have to come up with a strong response,” explained Breton. “Tourism is our priority and we are trying to do as much as we can with the existing funds.”

Beyond providing safety via short-term financing, the Commissioner said that tourism should benefit extensively also from the long-term crisis recovery plans, which will be funded through the next long-term EU budget (2021-2027). He is supporting the idea of a dedicated budget line “with the depth and firepower we need for the sector to get over this crisis”.

The Commissioner also added that the ultimate goal is to reform and reinvent the tourism sector and proposed to hold a European Tourism Summit for sustainable tourism this autumn.

Certainty on travel restrictions needed before summer holidays

Several MEPs also asked for more certainty regarding travel and movement restrictions that could continue in the coming months, including possible bans on visiting beaches because of social distancing rules. The Commissioner explained that sufficient guarantees for safety and security are needed before such restrictions are lifted. He added that the work on facilitating travel is ongoing and there will be more clarity ahead of the summer.

On the questions regarding passenger rights and vouchers being offered by companies following cancelled bookings, the Commissioner assured MEPs that

passenger rights remain protected and member states can already support their tourism businesses by providing liquidity for companies, including to cope with travellers' demands for reimbursement.

[Catch up with the debate by VOD](#)

Background

Members of the Tourism Task Force of the Transport and Tourism Committee [called on the Commission to present a tourism rescue action plan](#), which ensures timely national and European assistance for the travel and tourism sector, including via national compensation schemes and financial aid instruments, and establishes a crisis-management mechanism for the sector.

European Parliament noted in its [resolution on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences](#) that the transport and tourism sectors have been severely affected and suggests that a prevention and management mechanism be developed for the tourism sector at EU level to protect our workers, help our companies and ensure passenger safety.

[Press release – COVID-19: A coordinated EU health strategy needed, say MEPs](#)



The Committee Chair Pascal Canfin (Renew, FR), recalled important elements of the [resolution](#) adopted last week by Parliament, which asks for a common EU methodology to count infection rates and fatalities related to COVID-19, raises the issue of availability of medicines as well as the need to

coordinate an exit strategy at EU level.

Confinement measures must be lifted in a coordinated way

Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, underlined that the priority is now on saving lives and in order not to jeopardize the progress made so far, it is crucial to lift the confinement measures in Europe in a coordinated way and based on science. Replying to questions from MEPs, she informed the Committee that the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#) is working with member states on a common EU methodology to report COVID-19 fatalities. She also agreed with MEPs on the need to produce more medical supplies in the EU to be less reliant on imports from non-EU countries and underlined the limits to what can be done at EU level as long as there is little EU competence in the area of health. Finally, she informed MEPs that Commission President von der Leyen will host a global pledging conference on 4 May to raise funds and step up efforts to combat COVID-19, including by urgently developing a vaccine.

EU can now quickly respond through rescEU

Following questions from some MEPs on the need for more solidarity and EU coordination, Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management mentioned several examples of in-kind assistance from EU member states to those member states requesting such assistance as well as to neighbouring countries. He also said that following the amendment to [rescEU](#) to deal with public health emergencies, the EU is now much better equipped to react quickly and directly to requests for assistance from member states.

You can see a recording of the meeting [here](#).

Background

In a [resolution](#) adopted on 17 April, Parliament welcomed the solidarity in action shown by member states towards each other and called for the creation of a European Health Response Mechanism to better respond to any type of European health crisis and for a coordinated post-lockdown approach in the EU, in order to avoid a resurgence of the virus.

Parliament also [agreed to free up over €3 billion](#) to directly support healthcare systems in the most affected EU member states in their fight against the pandemic.

[Press release – EU funds must reach media and creative sector, say MEPs](#)



The culture and creative sector in the EU – especially individual creators and SMEs – and the media sector are being decimated by the crisis.

The European Union must therefore do more to help those struggling sectors to get back on their feet, stress the members of the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee, in a letter to Commissioners Thierry Breton and Mariya Gabriel, sent on Monday.

Emergency support fund for media

The media and press sectors currently play a crucial role in providing accurate information and thorough reporting. They are a critical antidote to fake news and disinformation, MEPs say. Yet the sector is currently being hit very hard, with a drop of as much as 80% of advertising revenue in some member states and uncertainty being the only certainty for the future..

MEPs are asking the Commission to explore the potential for an emergency fund to support the media and press sector, drawing on funds that cannot be spent under other programmes because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Culture and creative sector: help individual creators

They point out that the cultural and creative sector is made up of many individual creators and SMEs, as well as charities. Their status often makes it harder for them to qualify for national or EU support schemes.

To make sure EU funds reach the sector, MEPs are asking the Commission to consider increasing the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility (Creative Europe programme) by topping it up from the 2021 budget, or transferring funds from the European Fund for Strategic Investments.

Creating an ad hoc financial instrument under the European Investment Fund to channel funds to the sector should also be considered.

EU response to COVID-19 response is a good start, but more needs to be done

“The changes to the Structural Funds rules agreed by the European Parliament on Friday can help unlock additional financing. Projects dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic now qualify for 100% financing and thematic concentration rules have been loosened, so funds can be more easily channelled to where they are needed most,” said EP Culture Committee chair Sabine Verheyen (EPP, DE) on Monday.

“This money must reach the cultural and creative and media sectors quickly by responding to the specific business models and their particular needs. We call on the Commission and the member states to ensure that support schemes reach all those who need them. But we also need to do more at EU level to provide tailored support to the sectors as well as to provide credit and access to finance the cultural and creative sector”, she added.