

# COVID-19: CoR President calls for an EU Health Emergency Mechanism to support regions and cities



*Statement by the President of the European Committee of the Regions,  
Apostolos Tzitzikostas*

Every day across Europe, thousands local and regional leaders are leading the battle to limit the spread of the virus and manage its impact on the ground. As President of the European Committee of the Regions, and as Governor of the Region of Central Macedonia, I can see the professionalism, the dedication and the courage of all those who are leading the battle against COVID-19. We are mobilising our communities to protect the weakest citizens and ensure as much continuity as possible to our economies.

I pay a tribute to all those local and regional authorities on the frontline, and in particular to those paying a personal high price. Europe can rely on us. It can count on its Mayors, Presidents of Regions, Members of local and regional Assemblies, in leading the fight against the pandemic. At the same time, we need the EU to help our local communities at a time when they need Europe the most, by urgently putting the European Union's budget and intervention capacity at work for our citizens and business.

The efforts put in place by the European Commission and by the Council of the EU are heading in the right direction. Flexibility of Stability and Growth Pact and State Aid rules are crucial, as it is simplifying and accelerating the use of cohesion policy funding. Also the mobilisation of the European Investment Bank as well as of important tools such as the European Solidarity Fund and the European Globalisation Fund can benefit our local communities. But, in light of my direct experience and of the feedback I'm receiving from my colleagues and CoR members, I believe that the EU must go further by launching an EU Health Emergency Mechanism aimed at better supporting the thousands of regional and local leaders who are struggling to provide health services locally.

The Health Mechanism should help cities and regions across Europe to urgently hire additional medical staff, buy more medical devices, support intensive care services, and provide sanitation tools and material to hospitals and schools. It should streamline and make financial resources more readily available from regional, national and EU budgets for public health services. We need to invest more to save lives today and increase our resilience for tomorrow. The Mechanism should be funded through existing national and regional resources, available EU Structural and Investment Funds reoriented to the urgent needs, and new resources, up to 10 billion euro, from the current EU Budget's margins.

We also need the European Commission to further increase and simplify access

to available resources under the EU's cohesion policy, to speed-up the funds' use by the local communities who are struggling to manage the pandemic. Cohesion policy funds are proving, once again, to be a vital lifeline to those facing unprecedented challenges on the ground. Cohesion remains the EU's most powerful investment tool, enabling EU, national, regional and local actors to work together and react in times of crisis.

The road ahead is uncertain, and communities urgently need help today to not only protect lives, but also to rebuild in the aftermath. Across Europe we must be able to work in partnership and fairly share the responsibility. The European Union must offer support and solidarity to those most in need: never has this been more true than during the unfolding pandemic crisis. Regions and cities will remain on the front line in the fight against the virus. Our first duty as political leaders during these difficult times is to our citizens. We must join forces at local, regional, national and European level to protect them. I am confident that democracy is stronger than a virus and that, thanks to our joint efforts, over time we will emerge stronger from the COVID-19 crisis.

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