

Letter by President Charles Michel to the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella

I am writing to you at a time of serious crisis for Italy and Europe. A crisis in which fate has assigned to your country the difficult, dramatic role of being on the front line in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent.

First of all, I would like to offer to you, who represent the unity and national feeling of a great country that is the founder of the European integration project, my deepest condolences for the enormous toll of victims of this almost unprecedented threat to our societies.

At the same time, I feel I must address to all of Italy not only my own admiration, but also that of the members of the European Council that I have the honour to preside over, for the incredible efforts of the Italian health personnel, who have been working non-stop in emergency conditions for weeks now, and for the tireless work of the Civil Protection. We observe with emotion and respect the pioneering role of the Italian authorities in managing the response, with timely, extensive and socially significant measures to contain the spread of the infection. **At a time when some may have underestimated the extent of the threat, Italy has shown an unflinching sense of foresight, unity and resilience.** Italy's response has constituted, and constitutes, a model for many countries, not only in Europe, which are forced, with a delay of only a few weeks, to meet the same needs in terms of health and social response.

The European institutions are working with Prime Minister Conte and with the Italian government to coordinate more effective action at the EU level. The impact of this action is not always immediately visible to national public opinion, but we are convinced that they will help us to face the crisis more united, to come out of it as soon as possible, and to manage its inevitable economic and social impact.

It is in this sense that we have taken measures restricting the export of health protection and assistance equipment; the financial crisis support measures announced last night by President Lagarde of the ECB; support for research to rapidly develop an adequate vaccine and medical treatment; the closure of the external borders of the Schengen area; and the efforts, both internally and in third countries, to ensure that all European citizens who wish to return home can do so quickly. **Unity and solidarity are the pillars of our Union and any attempts to undermine them will immediately be stopped in their tracks.**

The European Council continues to give relentless political impetus and support to this joint action. We will consult again next week, to decide together on further measures and monitor progress.

I should like, through you, Mr President, to offer your citizens a simple and heartfelt message: ITALY IS NOT ALONE.

No country can do it alone in this crisis. No country should do it alone. We must help and support each other.

This is the true essence of European solidarity, and the deep sense of the community of states and the model of cooperation that Italy has so strongly contributed to build.

I know to what extent you share, personally and politically, the attachment to these shared values. And I am convinced that you will continue to interpret them, even at such a difficult time for public opinion, which is concerned about the crisis and the re-emergence of centrifugal forces that are instigated by identity politics.

I would like to renew, to you and through you to the country, the condolences of the European institutions for the tragedy that Italy is experiencing, and condolences to the many victims, their loved ones and all those who are fighting against this pandemic.

Italy and Europe will come out stronger than before.

As one hears echoing in all corners of your wonderful country : EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT.