

# Remarks by President Charles Michel after the video conference of the members of the European Council on 19 November 2020



Before discussing COVID-19, I would like to give you a brief update on the MFF. As you know, in July, we agreed by unanimity the MFF and the recovery package. We need to stay united on this. This financial package is essential for our economic recovery. We need to implement it as soon as possible.

Chancellor Merkel gave us an update on the state of play of the ongoing discussion following the last trilogue with Parliament. On the mechanism on conditionality, the vast majority of Member States agree with the compromise on the table. Some Member States have indicated that they are not able to support the majority. We will continue the discussions to find an acceptable solution to all.

On terrorism. We expressed our solidarity towards France and Austria. We will never shy away from defending our values and promoting our freedoms. And we will continue to fight the ideology of hatred, including online. It's crucial for us to look at the role of online platforms and set a stricter framework.

We will revert to this issue in December. We look forward to the commission's proposal on this, the Digital Services Act, which we expect in December.

COVID-19 in Europe remains serious and concerning and we are monitoring the situation closely. That's why today we continued our discussions to assess the current situation and coordinate our efforts. We have seen promising signs since our last meeting, but we remain cautious and vigilant. We cannot let down our guard.

We discussed again 3 important issues: testing, vaccines and the lifting of restrictive measures and coordination.

First, on testing. We discussed how to develop a common EU-approach for the use of rapid antigen tests. Those tests are complementary to PCR tests in our testing strategies. We need to work towards mutual recognition of tests and their results. For rapid tests, this is based on common criteria guaranteeing their performance. We also discussed national testing strategies and exchanged best practices.

Second, on vaccines. The results of recent trials are encouraging. Future vaccines are within reach, and we need to be ready. We agreed to speed up the preparations of national vaccination plans to ensure vaccines are available

and affordable to all EU citizens, once authorised.

We welcome that Member States and the Commission have already finalized several Advance Purchase Agreements. There will be, we know that, logistical challenges like storage, transport and the number of doses. And another challenge will be communication. The number of people distrustful of vaccines is growing, and we must clearly communicate their value.

Finally, we had a discussion on the lifting of restrictions. We need to learn past lessons and be cautious when we lift restrictions. It should be gradual and regressive. We all want to celebrate the end of year holidays but safely. Let's ring in the New Year safely.

COVID-19 has a devastating human cost. There are family and friends behind all the numbers and statistics. Let's never forget that. That is why we are working 24/7 to defeat this virus. Let's continue to stand together, work together, and support each other. We will follow up at our next European Council meeting in December.

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