



Council of the
European Union

051662/EU XXVII.GP
Eingelangt am 24/02/21

EN

6584/20

(OR. en)

PRESSE 16
PR CO 16

OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3757th Council meeting

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Health issues

Brussels, 6 March 2020

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P R E S S

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
 - Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
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ITEMS DEBATED

HEALTH

COVID-19 – exchange of views

On the basis of a presidency note ([Discussion paper](#)), ministers took stock of the current situation, which has significantly changed over the last few weeks. They exchanged views with the aim of finding the best approach for continuing the coordinated response to the current COVID-19 outbreak in the EU.

The Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) Andrea Ammon, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge and the Deputy Executive Director of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) Noël Wathion also participated in the discussion. The European Commission was represented by Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Crisis management Janez Lenarčič and Commissioner for Internal market Thierry Breton.

The debate was structured around the following questions:

- How do you assess existing mechanisms at EU level in view of the challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 in Europe? Could you suggest additional activities that would be helpful to further improve communication and information sharing?
- Bearing in mind the current pace of the spread of COVID-19 in the EU, how would you assess the effectiveness of measures currently in place in your country? Do you expect to focus less on prevention and preparedness measures in order to concentrate on treatment if the epidemiologic situation deteriorates?
- Would you assess measures already put in place by the Commission to give sufficient assistance to Member States if, despite measures undertaken, the spread of COVID-19 continues? Could you suggest additional activities that would be useful in helping your country in such situation?

At the beginning of the meeting, the Commission announced the increasing of the funding available for vaccine development from 10 million to 47 million euro. The Commission also reiterated its readiness to assist member states in their response to the COVID-19 outbreak and informed that a joint procurement procedure for the purchase of personal protective equipment by 20 member states was well under way.

Ministers welcomed the support mobilised by the European Commission so far, in particular in the areas of public health, research and civil protection.

The debate confirmed that the best contribution to protecting the health of EU citizens was to strengthen solidarity, cooperation and exchange of information in line with the commitments taken at the EPSCO Council meeting on 13 February 2020¹.

Ministers agreed that in order to counter the COVID-19 outbreak, it was important to further raise the collective and individual awareness about the threat posed by the COVID-19, strengthen the protection of people at risk and the elderly, and establish coherent containment measures, including evidence-based advice concerning travel to and from risk areas. Ministers also highlighted the need for monitoring at European level of the availability of medical equipment and medicines in the EU with the aim of securing the production, stocking, availability and rational use of protective equipment in the Union.

During the discussion, several challenges related to the response to the COVID-19 outbreak were identified:

- strengthening the coordination on containment measures and the exchange of information
- raising public awareness about the threats associated with COVID-19
- improving public communication to counter the spread of false information about the outbreak
- ensuring global cooperation and cross-sectoral approach
- avoiding possible shortages of protective equipment and medicines
- protecting health workers

¹ [Council conclusions on COVID-19, 13 February 2020](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none
