



Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the EU coordinated action to combat the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences

Brussels, 16 April 2020

Cher Monsieur le Président du Parlement,

Monsieur le Président du Conseil,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Députés,

Nous n'avons pas de bons mots pour parler de la douleur de l'Europe et de la souffrance du monde.

Nous pensons à toutes les victimes et nous prions pour toutes les familles en deuil.

Nous nous promettons de raconter leurs histoires et d'honorer leurs vies et leurs mémoires.

Et nous nous souviendrons toujours de chacune d'entre elles.

Nous nous souviendrons de Julie, la jeune française avec toute sa vie devant elle, et de Jan, l'historien tchèque qui s'est toujours battu pour ces valeurs, ou encore de Gino, le médecin italien sorti de retraite pour sauver la vie des autres.

Nous nous souviendrons du geste incroyable de Suzanne de laisser son respirateur aux plus jeunes en Belgique – et de l'image de Francis faisant ses adieux à son frère à travers une fenêtre d'hôpital en Irlande.

Nous nous souviendrons de la nouvelle maman polonaise qui ne verra pas son bébé grandir et du jeune entraîneur de football espagnol qui ne verra pas son rêve se réaliser.

Nous ne les oublierons jamais.

Les mères, les pères, les sœurs et les frères. Les jeunes et les aînés du nord ou du sud, de l'est ou de l'ouest. Les amis et les collègues, les voisins d'à côté et les étrangers de plus loin. Ceux qui ont des choses à dire et des choses à voir. Ceux sur l'épaule desquels on pleure et de l'amour desquels on dépend.

Chacune de ces dizaines de milliers d'histoires nous brise un petit morceau de notre cœur.

Mais elles renforcent aussi notre détermination pour que l'Europe fasse tout son possible pour sauver toutes les vies possibles.

Honourable Members,

You cannot overcome a pandemic of this speed and this scale without the truth. The truth about everything: the numbers, the science, the outlook – but also about our own actions.

Yes, it is true that no one was really ready for this. It is also true that too many were not there on time when Italy needed a helping hand at the very beginning.

And yes, for that, it is right that Europe as a whole offers a heartfelt apology.

But saying sorry only counts for something if it changes behaviour.

The truth is too that it did not take long before everyone realised that we must protect each other to protect ourselves.

And the truth is that Europe has now become the world's beating heart of solidarity.

The true Europe is standing up, the one that is there for each other when it is needed the most.

The one where paramedics from Poland and doctors from Romania save lives in Italy. Where ventilators from Germany provide a lifeline in Spain. Where hospitals in Czechia treat the sick from France. And where patients from Bergamo are flown in clinics to Bonn.

We have seen medical supplies go from Lithuania to Spain and respirators go from Denmark to Italy. In fact, we have seen every piece of equipment go in every direction across Europe, from whoever can spare it to whoever that needs it.

This makes me proud to be European.

Of course, there are still some who want to point fingers or deflect blame. And there are others who would rather talk like populists than tell unpopular truths.

To this, I say stop it.

Stop and have the courage to tell the truth.

Have the courage to stand up for Europe. Because this Union of ours will get us through. And it will be as strong tomorrow as we make it today.

And if you need inspiration, just look at the way the people of Europe are standing together – with empathy, humility and humanity.

And I pay tribute to them all. To the delivery drivers and the food suppliers. The shopkeepers, the factory packers and the balcony clappers. The companies changing their production lines to make the supplies we urgently need.

I pay tribute to the Portuguese volunteers sewing masks for their neighbours or the seven-year-old Greek pianist who composed an 'isolation waltz' to keep people going.

Above all else, I thank and I pay tribute to our heroes: the medics, the nurses, the care workers. They are the ones with bruises on their faces and tragic images in their hearts and minds. The ones holding the hands of the sick as softly and as lovingly as the families that cannot be there.

They are the ones saving our lives and saving our honour.

The ones we must protect so they can protect us all.

Und genau darauf konzentrieren wir uns.

Deswegen legen wir jetzt einen gemeinsamen Vorrat an medizinischer Ausrüstung an.

Deswegen investieren wir gemeinsam in Forschung nach Impfstoffen.

Deshalb kümmern wir uns zentral um die Beschaffung der am dringendsten benötigten Güter am Weltmarkt.

Und deswegen haben wir ein Team der besten Expertinnen und Experten aus ganz Europa zusammengestellt, die regelmäßig ihr Wissen teilen, das Leben retten kann.

Aus diesem Grund verzichten wir auf Zölle und Mehrwertsteuer bei der Einfuhr von medizinischem Gerät aus Drittstaaten.

Und das ist auch der Grund, warum wir Anfang dieses Monats ein einfaches aber großes Versprechen abgegeben haben:

Wir werden jeden verfügbaren Euro, den wir haben, auf jede erdenkliche Weise nutzen, um Leben zu retten und die Lebensgrundlagen der Europäerinnen und Europäer zu schützen.

Deswegen haben wir vorgeschlagen, sämtliche noch verfügbaren Mittel des aktuellen Haushalts in ein Notprogramm zu lenken.

Dadurch können fast 3 Milliarden Euro direkt dorthin fließen, wo sie gebraucht werden.

In neue Beatmungsgeräte und Schutzausrüstung.

In mehr Tests und mehr medizinische Hilfe für die Schwächsten, einschließlich derer, die in den Flüchtlingslagern warten.

Deswegen schlagen wir vor, jeden verfügbaren Euro aus den europäischen Struktur- und Investitionsfonds zur Bewältigung der Coronakrise einzusetzen.

Das bedeutet, dass wir volle Flexibilität ermöglichen.

Die Mittel können in anderen Regionen eingesetzt werden.

Sie können überall eingesetzt werden, wo sie am dringendsten gebraucht werden, unabhängig von den sonst üblichen Schranken wie Kofinanzierung, Zweckbindung oder Obergrenzen.

Mit diesem Paket, über das dieses Haus heute abstimmen wird, geht Europa an die Grenzen seiner Möglichkeiten.

And the same principle applies to protecting people's livelihoods.

Europe has had economic crises before. But we have never had an economic shutdown like this.

Nobody is to blame and everybody will need support. We need unprecedented measures to do this and to make sure our economy is ready to bounce forward as soon as possible.

And here again, the truth matters.

Europe has done more in the last four weeks than it did in the first four years in [of] the last crisis.

We have made our state aid rules more flexible than ever. In the last few days alone, we have approved schemes that will provide EUR 1 billion to Croatian businesses, 1.2 billion for Greek SMEs or 20 million to Portuguese fishermen. There are many more examples I could pick, from Latvia and Estonia to Belgium or Sweden.

For the first time in our history, we triggered the full flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact. Along with bold measures taken by the European Central Bank, this provides unprecedented fiscal and financial power.

And last week's decisions by EU Finance Ministers mean a further EUR 500 billion will be available to all of those who need it.

As part of this, I urge all Member States to make the most of SURE – the new scheme proposed by the Commission to protect Europeans against the risk of unemployment. It will provide EUR 100 billion to

help governments make up the difference if your employer has reduced your hours – or if you are self-employed and need help.

The beauty of SURE is two-fold. First, it will help those in need to pay their rents, bills and food and keep other businesses alive in the process. And second, it is the definition of European solidarity. The Member State that can, will put up guarantees so others can support the hardest hit in their countries.

As a result of all of this action, Europe's collective response is well above EUR 3 trillion euros. This is the most impressive response anywhere in the world.

But we know we will need more. A lot more. Because this will be a long haul and the world of tomorrow will look very different than that of yesterday.

Honourable Members,

I am convinced that Europe can shape this new world if it works together and rediscovers its pioneering spirit.

And for this, I want to cite a sentence from the Ventotene Manifesto – written by two of Italy and Europe's greatest visionaries: Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, one of our founding fathers.

Writing from their prison on a remote island, at the height of the war, when all hope of a united Europe seemed lost, they gave us these words of confidence:

The moment has arrived in which we must know how to discard old burdens, how to be ready for the new world that is coming, that will be so different from what we have imagined.

Dear Friends, this moment has arrived once again.

The moment to put behind us the old divisions, disputes and recriminations. To come out of our entrenched positions.

The moment to be ready for that new world. To use all the power of our common spirit and the strength of our shared purpose.

The starting point for this must be making our economies, societies and way of life more sustainable and resilient.

Finding the answers in this new world will require courage, trust and solidarity.

And it will need massive investment to jumpstart our economies.

We need a Marshall Plan for Europe's recovery and it needs to be put in place immediately.

There is only one instrument we have that is trusted by all Member States, which is already in place and can deliver quickly. It is transparent and it is time tested as an instrument for cohesion, convergence and investment.

And that instrument is the European budget.

The European budget will be the mothership of our recovery.

And for that reason, the next seven year budget must be different to what we had imagined, just as Spinelli said.

We will use the power of the whole European budget to leverage the huge amount of investment we need to rebuild the Single Market after Corona.

We will frontload it so we can power that investment in those crucial first years of recovery.

Because this crisis is different from any other one we have known. It is severely hitting completely

healthy companies because public life has shutdown.

This is why we will need innovative solutions and more headroom in the MFF to unlock massive public and private investment. This will kick-start our economies and drive our recovery towards a more resilient, green and digital Europe.

By that, we not only support but we also reshape our industries and services towards a new reality.

It will mean investing in our digital technologies, infrastructure and in innovation such as 3D printing to help us to be more independent and make the most of new opportunities.

And it also means doubling down on our growth strategy by investing in the European Green Deal. As the global recovery picks up, global warming will not slow down. First-mover advantage will count double and finding the right projects to invest in will be key.

A more modern and circular economy will make us less dependent and boost our resilience. This is the lesson we need to learn from this crisis.

Investing in large scale renovation, renewables, clean transport, sustainable food and nature restoration will be even more important than before. This is not only good for our economies, it is not only good for our environment but it reduces dependency by shortening and diversifying supply chains.

We also need to keep another reality in mind.

While the crisis is symmetric, the recovery will not be. Because not only the virus hits but also the economic shock too. Some regions will bounce back and others will have a harder time. And therefore, cohesion and convergence will be more important than ever.

The Single Market and cohesion policy are the two sides of the same coin. You need both to ensure prosperity across the whole EU.

Honourable Members,

This is the Europe that I believe can emerge from this crisis.

One that does everything it can to protect lives and livelihoods. One that is open to the world but can take care of itself. One that is more resilient, green and digital and that invests in its future together.

This is the path to recovery. It will be a long road and the whole world will be trying to find its way.

This crisis will likely redefine our politics, our geopolitics and possibly globalisation itself. And in this new world Europe will need to stick together through thick and thin.

And as I look around our Union – and I see all that humanity and that ingenuity – I know that we can and we will do just that.

Honourable Members,

They say a strong soul shines bright after every storm.

If we all stand up for Europe today – with courage, trust and solidarity – I know that tomorrow Europe's soul will shine brighter than ever before.

Long live Europe.

Vive l'Europe!

Lang lebe Europa!