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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT / Press Release

## Parliament's case for an ambitious EU long-term budget

9 APRIL / 2020

MEPs are arguing for a strong EU budget for 2021-2027 that will respond to the challenges Europe faces and deliver on Europeans' expectations.

The budget ensures the EU has the financial means to run the programmes and projects that benefit Europeans. EU funding supports farmers, cities, regions, students, researchers, businesses and NGOs across Europe.

The current EU long-term budget ends on 31 December 2020. The European Commission presented a proposal in May 2018 for the next financing period from 2021 to 2027. The European Parliament adopted its position in November 2018 and re-confirmed it in October 2019. Member states in the Council have not been able to agree on a position yet, so negotiations between the institutions cannot start.

After the EU summit on 20-21 February, which was dedicated to the EU long-term budget, [Parliament President David Sassoli](#) said Parliament was disappointed by the failure of

the European Council to find an agreement and expressed hope that the future negotiations will show the EU is ready to back up its ambitions with sufficient funds.

*"Europe is facing unprecedented challenges such as climate change, digitalisation and a new geopolitical order," said Sassoli. "Lowering our ambitions could only have a negative impact on years of progress and integration."*

While the final decision on the next long-term budget is taken by the Council, based on the result of negotiations, Parliament has to give its consent for it to come into force.

**Europe is facing unprecedented challenges such as climate change, digitalisation and a new geopolitical order. [...] Lowering our ambitions could only have a negative impact on years of progress and integration.**

### EU budget looking to the future

Parliament has consistently argued that in order for the EU to meet people's expectations and make good on its commitments and ambitions, it must have the necessary means to invest in the future of the EU.

One of the key questions is where EU funding will best serve Europeans. MEPs want to maintain funding for farmers and poorer regions at the current level. The Common Agricultural Policy is funded exclusively at EU level and aims to provide safe and quality food as well as decent incomes for farmers, while support for less developed regions promotes solidarity and ensures that everyone benefits from the single market.

But the EU faces other challenges that require adequate investment, such as migration and security and new ones such as the development of digital technologies. Parliament wants climate action in the EU budget to be stepped up and adequately financed, also to facilitate a just transition to a carbon-neutral economy, to ensure that nobody is left behind. In addition MEPs call for more investment in areas such as young people, research and innovation as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

### EU benefits outweigh contributions

The EU budget is an investment tool that brings added value and creates opportunities for people and companies across borders. The EU Single Market, for example, removes barriers to trade and makes it possible for companies from any EU country to enter the market of other member states. Estimates quoted by the European Commission show that the benefits are much larger than the contribution each country makes to the EU budget.

**Studies** show that the existence of the Single Market has created 3.6 million jobs since 1990 and if it had not been there, the EU's gross domestic product would have been 8.7% lower. The average EU citizen gains €840 more per year thanks to the Single Market.

### Meeting Europeans' expectations

People expect the EU to focus on their priorities, but the 2019 Eurobarometer survey shows that there is a difference between what people want the EU to do and what they perceive as the EU's main areas of spending.

While 48% of respondents said that most of the EU budget should be spent on employment and social affairs and 41% of respondents believed it should be spent on climate and environment policy (respondents were asked to identify up to four key policies), only 16% said that most of the EU budget is currently spent on employment and social policy and 17% said that most of the budget is spent on climate and environment policy.

### How big should a strong EU budget be?

The size of the EU budget is a small fraction of national spending by EU countries. After assessing the resources needed to meet the objectives in each policy area, Parliament is proposing a budget of 1.3% of EU gross national income. The average national spending of EU governments is over 47% of gross national income.

MEPs have repeatedly insisted that the budget should not depend primarily on direct contributions from member states and have called for new own resources to the budget. They could be, for example, a tax on plastic waste, revenue from the EU emissions trading scheme or a new tax on major digital companies. MEPs said in a resolution from October 2019 that without an agreement on the reform of the EU own resources system, Parliament will not give its consent to the next long-term budget.

### Useful documents:

- [The EU's long-term budget explained](#)
- [Position of the European Commission](#)
- [Position of the European Parliament](#)

EUROPEAN COMMISSION / Speech



# Press statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius on the new Circular Economy Action Plan

12 MARCH / 2020

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

Today is an important day for environment and industrial policy. Today we are taking a big step to the low-carbon and resource-efficient economy of the future. Being an economic heart of the Green Deal, **circular economy is in fact our guarantee for sustainable growth of our economies.**

The linear growth model of "take-make-use-discard" has reached its limits. With the growth of the world population and consumption, this linear model pushes us closer and closer to a resource crisis. The only way ahead is decoupling economic growth from extraction of primary resources and their environmental impacts. This is very much in line with both the industrial strategy we adopted yesterday, and the biodiversity strategy that's just around the corner.

The circular economy is the path towards more sustainable use of resources, because it is about more sustainable production, more sustainable consumption, and better waste management.

We have witnessed how progressive businesses, consumers and public authorities in Europe have endorsed and supported this sustainable model.

The new Circular Economy Action Plan is about taking all of this to mainstream.

We designed this new Action Plan with three goals in mind. We want to strengthen **competitiveness of European industry, empower consumers and protect the environment** at the same time.

The plan is rich in actions and various work strands that aim at improving many aspects of our daily life. At the heart of the plan is the sustainable product policy framework.

We want to make sure that products placed on EU market are designed to last longer, to be easier to repair and upgrade, easier to recycle and easier to reuse.

Consumers will be better protected, with a genuine right to repair. This will be a game changer for consumers that currently have no other real option but to throw away dysfunctional products.

We will be giving more power to consumers through better information about products and services. When you have information that is trustworthy and reliable, you can avoid green-washing much more easily.

Green products should become the norm among citizens, but we have to start from ourselves, the public authorities. Green public procurement requirements will be essential to boost demand for more sustainable products and services. The new Circular Economy Action Plan focuses on the sectors that use most resources, the areas where circularity will have maximum effect. It includes electronics and ICT, plastics, textiles, packaging, batteries and vehicles, construction and buildings, food, water and nutrients.

We want to transform these sectors into circular systems where waste is reduced to the minimum. If waste cannot be avoided, it has to be turned into a valuable resource. As Europe is not rich in natural resources, the circular economy would strengthen the immunity of our economy from geopolitical challenges. It will provide new business opportunities in the EU and beyond, to the benefit of citizens.

For example, electronics and ICT are products for which each consumer would want to have the right to repair, including to upgrade. We will also explore options for an EU-wide take back scheme to return or sell back old phones, tablets and chargers. In addition, we will also address non-rechargeable batteries, where alternatives exist.

Another item which we hold daily in our hands, often without noticing, is packaging. Packaging waste generation reached a record level – each one of us generates more than 170 kilograms per capita. The only way is down. We will work on

design for re-use and recyclability of packaging, mandatory recycled plastic content and waste reduction targets.

We will also address the sectors that create a lot of pressure on our environment – construction, transport and food. For these sectors you can expect dedicated strategies that will again look at the whole lifecycle of products.

This second Action Plan is very wide ranging, with many ground-breaking, legislative initiatives to be rolled out over the course of this mandate. I am confident that those actions will improve many aspects of our lives, create numerous business opportunities and have a positive impact on the environment.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION / Research Papers

## Towards a sustainable food system

9 APRIL / 2020



The Farm to Fork Strategy should have been released at the end of March 2020, but due to the current crisis caused by the Covid-19 outbreak, the European Commission is reviewing its work programme for 2020 and the Farm to Fork Strategy will be probably rescheduled until later this year. We will keep you posted on that.

In the meantime, **two new publications** have been released:

- The [European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors](#) published a scientific opinion [Towards a Sustainable Food System](#), adopted the 31 March 2020.

This scientific advice is intended to inform the development of the 'Farm to Fork Strategy', expected later this spring.

With this report they urge the European Commission to take the lead and drive change towards a sustainable food system in the EU and beyond, specifically recommending that environmental, social and economic sustainability are made the central objectives of all policies relevant to the food system. It is therefore underlined how **food must be viewed more as a common than a consumer good**, as has been the tendency in the past.

- On 9 April 2020, the first version of [A Sustainable Food System for the European Union \(SAPEA\)](#) was published.

According to the European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, this report is the main evidence base for scientific opinion and provides more in-depth analysis of the topic. We highlight the **mention of our member FoodCloud on pag. 134** as an example of good practice of surplus food redistribution to reduce food waste. Well done, congratulations!

Both reports focus on **food waste** as a key issue in transitioning to a more circular food system (SAPEA 2020a: 4). Indeed, the globally high-level of food waste can be seen as a symptom of the current, unsustainable food system. As underlined in the SAPEA Report, a more circular model would be based on "principles of waste reduction, bio-refining unpreventable losses, closing nutrient loops, improving efficiency, utilising by-products, creating higher-quality food, and favouring changes in unhealthy diets" (Jurgilevich et al. 2016: cited in SAPEA 2020a).

The circular model should be applied along the whole food supply chain, from production to consumption, including processing and transport. The main goal is that these scientific reports will further help the European Commission take the necessary steps towards a sustainable food system and with that the implementation of the European Green Deal.

### Useful documents:

[A sustainable food system for the European Union - report](#)

- [Systematic review](#)
- [Summary leaflet](#)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT / Press Release

Press Release

# COVID-19: Helping farmers secure supply of food for all

24 MARCH / 2020

In two separate letters, addressed yesterday to the EU's Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski and to Croatia's Agriculture Minister Marija Vučković (currently Chair of the EU Council of agriculture ministers), the Chair of the EP's Agriculture Committee Norbert Lins (EPP, DE) welcomed the actions taken by the Commission so far, which allow EU states to [give farmers more time to apply for subsidies](#) and help them further with [temporary state-aid measures](#). But he urgently called for further ones to avoid disruptions in food supplies.

*"European farmers are not only struggling to continue their daily work but even more so, face ever increasing difficulties to access the means of production and to deliver their products to European consumers. This grave situation calls for urgent action,"* Mr Lins stressed.

*"Our farmers who are on the front line to maintain the food supply to citizens across Europe, thus ensuring EU food security in these challenging times, are waiting for decisive and effective actions to alleviate the impact of this crisis,"* he said.

***EU needs further measures to ensure continuous supply of food for citizens and support farmers' efforts to this end.***

Mr Lins welcomed the Commission's effort to maintain free movement of goods on the internal market but insisted this is not enough.

*"We call on the Commission to go one step further, not only allowing foodstuffs to pass borders via the "green lanes" but also allowing essential inputs, such as feed, fertilisers and plant protection products as well as ingredients and materials for the agro-industrial sector in order to allow them to continue providing their crucial goods to European consumers,"* he said.

The EU Commission should prepare strategies that would *"simplify [administrative] procedures as much as possible while granting maximum flexibility to Member States"* and *"support the most affected sectors"* and fight market speculation, Mr Lins said.

He also called on the EU's executive and member states to find ways to allow some sort of cross-border movement for seasonal workers during the harvest season, even if travel restrictions are still in place, to ensure that the produce can reach the market and food shortages are avoided.

## Background

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the [EU Commission has allowed Member States](#) to offer an extension of one month for the deadline for farmers to submit their applications for direct payments and certain payments under rural development.

The [EU's executive also adopted](#) a [Temporary Framework](#) that allows EU states to use the full flexibility foreseen under EU State aid rules to support their economy. This should ensure that sufficient liquidity remains available to businesses of all types, including farms, and preserve the continuity of their economic activity during and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION / Speech



# Europe is showing the power of solidarity

20 MARCH / 2020

Following a video conference with leaders of political groups in the European Parliament, European Parliament President David Sassoli called an extraordinary plenary session for March 26 to approve measures to tackle COVID-19. It will be the first plenary session to use a distance voting system.

In a statement following the meeting, President Sassoli said:

*"I want to express my warmth and solidarity to all those suffering and all those who have lost loved ones. I want to stress my admiration and support for all those who are on the front line fighting this pandemic.*

*Europe is moving. Faced with this dramatic situation, with a duty to defend lives, livelihoods, and stability for all, the European Union is acting. Of course, we had to fight against national selfishness, but now it is clear how we are going to face this emergency.*

*Last night's decision by the ECB to make 750 billion Euros available adds to Parliament's calls, to the measures of the Commission, to those of the States, to possible additional initiatives, such as mobilizing another 500 billion from the European Stability Mechanism, the so-called bailout fund.*

*We are talking about an intervention that, overall, is close to two trillion euros. The greatest demonstration of the power of European solidarity ever seen. Stronger even than the Marshall plan, the programme that helped us get back from the ruins of World War II.*

*This money will help us limit the effects of Covid19, and will support research to identify an effective vaccine. It provides useful resources to support our economy and our model of social protection. It will protect jobs, businesses, and ensure families are not left alone in the face of these challenging times.*

*At this stage it provides money needed by our medical facilities, by doctors and staff who, with great passion and generosity, are committed to saving the lives of many.*

*The Union cannot allow anyone to remain alone. None of you will be left alone. The European Parliament is also doing and will continue to do its duty.*

*I was determined that Parliament would remain open because democracy cannot be stopped by this virus, because we are the only European institution elected by citizens and we want to represent and defend them. For this reason, I decided to convene an extraordinary plenary session on Thursday 26 March in order to approve the emergency measures presented by the European Commission. It will be the first plenary that will use the distance voting system.*

*In the face of this emergency we must use all the means we have available. It is a difficult time. We want to be close to families who have lost loved ones, to those who are sick, and to European compatriots who are experiencing a moment of great fear. We must use all our energies and appeal to everyone's responsibility. Europe will only succeed if we are united, courageous and supportive."*

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT / Press Release

Press Release

# COVID-19: Council adopts measures for immediate release of funds

30 MARCH / 2020

The EU is taking swift action to make available money to help tackle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council today adopted two legislative acts to quickly **release funding from the EU budget** for tackling the COVID-19 crisis. One of the acts amends the rules of the structural and investment funds, while the other extends the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund.

The **Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative** will give member states access to **€37 billion of cohesion money** to strengthen healthcare systems, as well as support small and medium-sized enterprises, short-term working schemes, and community-based services.

Of the total, about **€8 billion** will come from unspent pre-financing in 2019 under the structural funds. The new measure allows member states to spend unused money to mitigate the impact of the pandemic instead of returning it to the EU budget.

Another **€29 billion** will be disbursed early from allocations which would have been due later this year.

Expenditure will be made available as of **1 February 2020** to cover costs already incurred in efforts to save lives and protect citizens.

Member states will also have **greater flexibility to make transfers** between cohesion policy programmes in order to redirect resources to where they are most needed.

The Council also amended the scope of the **EU Solidarity Fund to include public health emergencies** in addition to natural disasters.

**This will help member states and accession countries meet people's immediate needs during the coronavirus pandemic.**

Given the urgency of the situation, both legislative acts have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 31 March and will enter into force on 1 April 2020.

#### Useful documents:

- [Regulation concerning the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#)
- [Regulation extending the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund](#)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT / Position Paper

# COVID-19 response: the EESC calls for strengthening solidarity to help the most deprived

15 APRIL / 2020

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) gave its backing to the Commission's proposal to amend the regulation governing the FEAD in a bid to ensure that Europe's most vulnerable citizens remain supported during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a position paper adopted on 15 April, **the EESC says it is in favour of introducing specific measures aimed at protecting the most deprived from the disease and at ensuring that FEAD assistance still reaches them despite the crisis.**

The measures include reducing the administrative burden to enable EU countries to act more quickly, allowing the authorities to use electronic vouchers to deliver food aid and basic material assistance, and covering the cost of protective equipment for those delivering it.

**Read the full position paper [here](#).**



FUND FOR EUROPEAN AID TO THE MOST DEPRIVED / Updates

# COVID-19: FEAD to continue supporting people in need

25 APRIL / 2020

In the context of the Covid-19 outbreak, on 2nd April the **European Commission** adopted an ambitious proposal for a [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus \(CRII Plus\) Package](#) which includes a proposal for amending the [FEAD Regulation](#):

- It provides for sufficient flexibility for Member States to **adjust the schemes of support to the current context**, including by allowing **alternative schemes of delivery** e.g. through electronic vouchers and by allowing Member States to **amend certain elements of the operational program** for the distribution of food/basic material assistance (FEAD OP I) without requiring an adoption by Commission decision.
- All FEAD expenditure for operations fostering crisis response capacities in the context of the Coronavirus outbreak are **eligible as of 1 February 2020**. If the COM proposal is accepted, these actions can be financed from that date.
- This proposal makes it possible to provide the necessary **protective materials and equipment** to partner organizations outside the technical assistance budget.
- The proposal also allows **Member States to benefit from a higher co-financing (up to 100%)**, upon their request, for the next accounting year (1 July 2020-30 June 2021)
- The proposal includes **specific provisions** regarding the eligibility of costs incurred by beneficiaries **in case the delivery of food/basic material assistance or social inclusion assistance is delayed** as well as for suspended and not fully implemented operations.
- Finally, it reduces administrative burden for MS, allowing them to focus on the response to this crisis, by providing lighter monitoring, audit and control requirements during this period.

In fact, on Friday 17 April 2020, **the European Parliament adopted the additional measures so that EU funding can be granted immediately and with exceptional flexibility to combat the COVID-19 pandemic**. Measures include the possibility to finance the provision of protective equipment for workers and volunteers, the temporary 100% co-financing from the EU budget and lighter reporting and audit measures during the COVID-19 crisis.

Finally, the 23 April 2020 **the Council adopted these new rules intended to minimise the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the most deprived EU citizens**. The amendments to the regulation on FEAD will make it easier for member states, partner organisations and other parties involved to access the fund and protect their staff involved in distributing the aid. **Around 13 million EU citizens benefit from the fund each year.**

The specific measures for addressing the outbreak of COVID-19 amending Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 were published on the Official Journal of the EU on 24 April 2020. The Regulation entered into force on 25 April 2020.

#### Useful documents:

- [Regulation on FEAD](#) (available in all EU languages)
- [Amending Regulation](#) (available in all EU languages)



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This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.