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In the Storm

Author: Jean-Dominique Giuliani



The rapid spread of the coronavirus and the confinement of half of humanity has created an unprecedented situation. The crisis raises many questions about the role of the State and borders, civil liberties, the responsibility of China and the United States, and the future of our economies. In these difficult times, Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Chairman of the Foundation, calls on the leaders of the European Union to set an example so that Europe can be the architect of indispensable international cooperation.

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Contents

Foundation : Pandemic/EU **Coronavirus** : European Council - G20 - Parliament - Economy - Confinement - Italy - Eurogroup - Agriculture - Cohesion - Transport - Hungary - Banks **Commission** : Investments - Rights/Democracy - Overseas **Council** : Enlargement **Diplomacy** : Irini/Mediterranean - EU/Vietnam **Court of Justice** : Poland - Transport/Passengers - Withdrawal/loans **European Agencies** : Crime/Coronavirus - Counterfeit/medicines **France** : Takuba/Sahel **Kosovo** : Collapse/Government **Council of Europe** : Croatia - Hungary - Migrants - Social Rights **NATO** : Macedonia/North **WTO** : Arbitration/MPIA **Eurostat** : Trade **Culture** : Creative Europe - Museum/Warsaw - Museum/Vienna - Museum/Paris - Museum/Dali - Museum/London

[Agenda](#) | [Other issues](#) | [Contact](#)

Foundation :

Covid-19: European responses, a complete picture



Faced with the health and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the Union is trying to deploy the various means at its disposal. In order to respond and be resilient for the future, its capacity to act depends largely on the Member States and their resolve to act together. The Foundation offers you a summary of all the measures taken at national and European level to date... [Read more](#)

Coronavirus :

European Council Meeting



The European Council met on 26 March to discuss the European response to the coronavirus crisis. The heads of State and government instructed the Eurogroup to formulate proposals within two weeks to address the economic consequences of the pandemic. They also discussed coordinated action to stop the spread of the virus, support

research, share medical equipment and repatriate European citizens to their countries... [Read more](#)

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G20 Decisions



On 26 March, G20 leaders discussed the challenges posed by the epidemic which originated in China. They pledged to take all necessary financial and health measures to protect vulnerable people and strengthen information sharing and medical supplies. Measures will be taken to protect employees and SMEs to minimize the economic impact of the pandemic. In addition, G20 countries are committing a total of \$5 trillion to support the economy, keeping trade links open and strengthening cooperation with the IMF and WHO... [Read more](#)

MEPs approve European measures



On 26 March MEPs adopted three urgent measures to support the European economy in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic at an extraordinary session held by electronic voting: the €37 billion investment initiative, the extension of the Solidarity Fund to public health emergencies, and the temporary lifting of the obligation for airlines to use their slots which forced them to fly even when there are no passengers. The Council must formally approve these measures... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#) | [Other link](#)

Measures to support the economy



On 25 March, the German Parliament approved a plan including a loan, a bank guarantee to businesses and direct aid to micro-enterprises and the self-employed. In France, the first economic measures came into force on 25 March, such as the creation of a Solidarity Fund for small businesses and the deferral of invoices or charges. In Spain the government set up a guarantee fund for businesses on 24 March. In Poland, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki assured that his government's "anti-crisis shield" would be equivalent to 10% of the country's GDP. The British government has announced measures to alleviate business costs... [Read more](#)

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National Measures



On 27 March, France decided to extend confinement until 15 April, and Belgium until 19 April. On 28 March, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez strengthened confinement by announcing the suspension of non-essential activities. In Germany, restrictions on movements and gatherings will not be lifted until 20 April, the Chancellery said. In the United Kingdom, where confinement is in place indefinitely, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, himself infected with Covid-19, "urged" the British to stay home. In Poland, gatherings are limited to five people until April 11, including for Mass, weddings and funerals, and travel is limited to what is strictly necessary... [Read more](#)

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Measures taken in Italy



Following the strengthening of containment measures in Italy on 22 March, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced on 25 March certain amendments to the initial decree. Many activities, such as coal mining, oil and gas extraction and other agricultural activities have been suspended... [Read more](#)

Eurogroup meeting to support the economy



The Eurogroup met on 24 March to discuss further measures to address the economic consequences of the coronavirus. Finance ministers from the euro area and non-euro area States examined the possibilities of using the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to support Member States in their recovery policy... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of Agriculture Ministers



Agriculture ministers met on March 25 to discuss solutions to address the negative impacts of coronavirus on the agriculture and fisheries sector. They considered it necessary to introduce support measures for agriculture and stressed the importance of ensuring secure supply

routes. They proposed the simplification of certain CAP procedures for farmers... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of ministers responsible for cohesion



On 27 March, the ministers responsible for cohesion policy discussed the measures taken in the framework of the Coronavirus Investment Initiative. They agreed on the need to make the funds accessible free of administrative difficulties and on the need to adopt rapidly the 2021-2027 budget so that the economic response to the crisis caused by the pandemic can be continued... [Read more](#)

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Waiver to the rules regarding airport slots to help airlines



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The EU will suspend the rules on airport slots that require airlines to use at least 80% of their take-off and landing slots until 24 October 2020 so that they can retain them for the following year. The waiver adopted by the Council on 30 March is designed to help air carriers cope with the sharp fall in air traffic caused by the coronavirus crisis...

Unlimited full powers for Viktor Orban



On 30 March, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law extending the powers of Viktor Orban's government through a state of unlimited emergency justified by the coronavirus crisis. Adopted by 137 of the 190 deputies, the text allows, among other things, to legislate by decree without Parliament, to suspend certain laws, to punish the dissemination of "false news" and to suspend elections and referendums... [Read more](#)

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Banks must help in the common effort to counter the epidemic



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Andrea Enria, Chair of the ECB's Banking Supervisory Board, stressed the importance of maintaining capital in the system so that banks can grant loans and absorb losses at a time when it is particularly needed. This is why they must temporarily refrain from paying dividends or buying back their own shares in the face of the historic crisis we are facing...

Commission :

Guidelines regarding the screening of foreign investments



On 26 March, the Commission recommended that the Member States make full use of the mechanisms at their disposal to screen foreign investment and points out that intervention is possible when the investment threatens public order or the security of the Union. In the context of the current crisis, the Commission is trying to protect strategic companies and technologies, in particular those in the health sector, from being taken over by companies from third countries... [Read more](#)

Plan of action regarding Human Rights and Democracy



On 25 March the Commission presented an action plan on human rights and democracy for the next five years. It is based on five guidelines: protection of individuals, inclusiveness, promotion of a global system for democracy, the use of new technologies and strengthening collaboration. The Commission also proposes that the Council decide by qualified majority, rather than unanimity, on matters covered by the Action Plan... [Read more](#)

Report on the Union's outermost regions



On 23 March, the Commission adopted a report on the progress made under the strategic partnership initiated in 2017 with the Union's outermost regions, in which it highlights the action taken to stimulate growth in areas such as agriculture, biodiversity and the circular economy, research and innovation, employment, education and training, digital and transport... [Read more](#)

Council :

Green light for negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia



The Council decided on 25 March to open accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania, following an agreement by European Affairs Ministers the day before. It calls for the first Intergovernmental Conference with North Macedonia to begin as soon as possible, but has requested Albania to complete its reform programme before a conference can be held... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Mandate for naval operation Irini



Member States agreed on March 26 on the mandate for Irini, a new naval operation to take over from Operation Sophia and monitor the UN arms embargo on Libya. Greece agreed to be the landing country for shipwrecked migrants who could be rescued by EU vessels... [Read more](#)

Free-trade agreement with Vietnam



On 30 March the Council adopted the free trade agreement with Vietnam, which can enter into force once the Vietnamese National Assembly has also ratified it. This is the second trade agreement with a South-East Asian country, after Singapore. Tariffs will be phased out at a rate of 99%. The agreement also contains provisions on labour rights, human rights and sustainable development. The investment protection agreement still needs to be ratified by the Member States... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

Dismissal of two requests from Polish courts



On 26 March the Court of Justice of the European Union rejected two requests for preliminary rulings from two Polish courts asking the Court whether recent Polish laws on disciplinary sanctions against judges were in conformity with European law. The Court ruled that the disputes involving the two courts did not fall within the scope of European law. However, it recalled that any sanction against the magistrates of both courts for making these requests would be unlawful... [Read more](#)

Compensation for long flight delays



In a judgment delivered on 26 March, the Court of Justice ruled that a passenger can claim compensation from an airline in the event of a long delay, even if the journey has been booked through a travel agency and there is therefore no contract directly between the passenger and the airline. The airline remains subject to its contractual obligations... [Read more](#)

Decision on the right of consumers taking out loans



The Court of Justice ruled in a decision delivered on 26 March that consumer loan agreements must clearly state the details of the withdrawal period. It is not sufficient for the contract to refer to national legal provisions of which the consumer should become acquainted by his own means... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Europol warns of criminal activities associated with the coronavirus



Europol detailed in a report published on 27 March the emergence of new criminal practices taking advantage of the situation related to the coronavirus epidemic. Organised crime networks are increasingly resorting to cybercrime, fraud in connection with virus protection equipment, the sale of fake health equipment and burglaries where criminals pose as medical personnel. In the face of these practices, Europol calls on citizens to be vigilant... [Read more](#)

Warning against fake and counterfeit medicines

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) warned consumers on 24 March about fake medicines being supplied by unauthorised online pharmacies in response to the new coronavirus crisis. Europol has denounced the



behaviour of criminal groups who do not hesitate to sell fake medicines supposedly to enable sick people to be cured of Covid-19. More than 4 million fake medicines have been seized in recent weeks... [Read more](#)

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France :

Sahel: official launch of the European force Takuba



Takuba, the European force in the Sahel, was officially launched on 27 March on the initiative of France. Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Estonia have confirmed their intention to participate in the force, and may be joined by Sweden. Germany, the United Kingdom and Norway have announced their political support for the mission. Takuba will work in coordination with the G5 Sahel countries, the UN Minusma mission, and the EU missions EUTM Mali, EUCAP Mali and EUCAP Niger... [Read more](#)

Kosovo :

Parliament overthrows the government



The Kosovar government led by Albin Kurti (Self-Determination) was overthrown by Parliament on 25 March. The motion of no-confidence tabled by a minority party in the ruling coalition received 82 votes out of 120, due to tensions between the Prime Minister and President Hashim Thaci. President Thaci now has a choice between appointing a new Prime Minister or dissolving parliament... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

GRECO on Croatia



In a report published on 24 March, the Council of Europe's Group of Anti-Corruption States (GRECO) calls on Croatia to step up its efforts to prevent corruption in government and the police. It suggests in particular the elaboration of a code of conduct for members of the government, integrity standards for advisory actors, and a survey of police activities most exposed to corruption... [Read more](#)

Letter from the Secretary-General on the state of emergency in Hungary



On 24 March, Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric sent a letter to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban expressing her concerns about the respect for democracy and human rights in Hungary. The establishment of a state of emergency to combat the Covid-19 pandemic has extended the Prime Minister's prerogatives. The Secretary General recalls that the state of emergency must remain an exceptional and temporary situation and preserve democratic debate... [Read more](#)

Fundamental rights of refugees and migrants on Europe's borders



The Council of Europe and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights issued a joint note on 27 March on the fundamental rights of refugees and migrants at the Union's borders. The two bodies recall that although it is the duty of Member States to protect their borders in order to ensure public order and health, they must also protect the rights of individuals, and recall what is allowed under European and international asylum law... [Read more](#)

Warning about the state of social rights



The Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights warned on 24 March of the situation of the social rights of children, families and migrants in Europe. The Committee published 896 conclusions, including nearly 300 findings of non-compliance with the European Social Charter. It warns in particular about child labour, exclusion, poverty and violence against children, as well as the case of stateless children. The Committee highlights the discrimination between women and men and the cases of domestic violence observed. It also notes the difficulties of access to housing for certain minorities, such as the Roma and Travellers... [Read more](#)

NATO :

Membership of North Macedonia



North Macedonia officially became NATO's 30th member country on 27 March. The country's flag will be raised at NATO Headquarters on 30 March... [Read more](#)

WTO :

Towards an interim appeal mechanism for trade disputes



The European Union and 15 members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreed on 27 March on the establishment of a mechanism to overcome the deadlock in the WTO Appellate Body and settle trade disputes. The mechanism will operate in a similar way to the WTO Appellate Body and may be joined by new States... [Read more](#)

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Eurostat :

International goods trade surplus in 2019



Eurostat announced on 25 March that the European Union's trade surplus totalled €197 billion in 2019, a significant increase over 2018 of €152 billion... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Creative Europe at Home



The Commission has launched the #CreativeEuropeAtHome campaign to identify cultural activities funded by its Creative Europe programme. Programme beneficiaries can promote their initiatives on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using keywords, some of which will be shared on the programme's accounts... [Read more](#)

National Museum of Warsaw



The National Museum in Warsaw gives virtual access to some of its exhibitions and collections. You can also choose certain themes, arts or artists... [Read more](#)

Belvedere Collections digitally accessible



The Belvedere Museum in Vienna has made its collections available to the public in a virtual way. It also organises a daily virtual guided tour at 3 pm on its Facebook page. Enjoy a complete immersion in Austrian art, from medieval times to the present day... [Read more](#)

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Works with commentary at the Musée d'Orsay



The Musée d'Orsay in Paris is presenting a selection of works with commentary in various fields: painting, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, graphic arts and architecture. You can learn more about the works of Cézanne, Courbet, Degas, Manet or Bourdelle... [Read more](#)

Visit the Dali Museum in Figueres



Located in the city of Figueres, Spain, the Dalí Theatre-Museum is entirely devoted to the work of Salvador Dalí. The museum offers virtual tours and videos... [Read more](#)

[Tate Britain Collections on line](#)



The Tate Britain in London has a virtual presentation of its collections with artists such as Turner, Henry Moore; themes, such as cooking, fashion or comedy; artistic styles, such as romanticism, watercolour or canvas... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



2nd April 2020

Meeting of NATO's Foreign Affairs Ministers

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