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The Letter in PDF format

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European solidarity in times of crisis: a legacy to be deepened in the face of Covid-19

Author: Yves Bertoncini



Far from being innate or automatic, European solidarity is the product of a political process, sometimes shaped by long diplomatic negotiations, but also improvised in successive crises. The coronavirus pandemic will result in greater solidarity among Europeans, on the express condition that the requisite decisions are taken on a sufficiently clear and consensual basis, with due respect for national sensitivities.

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Front page! :

Living with the virus



"Without a vaccine, we will have to live with the coronavirus after deconfinement. These are therefore difficult times for all citizens and their governments. But for the European Union and its institutions, it could be a litmus test," writes Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

Elections :

Presidential election's democratic, legitimate nature cast in doubt



In May, Poland may witness an unprecedented presidential election: one without polling stations and ballot boxes, to be held solely by post, scheduled for 10 and 24 May. 10 candidates are running, including the outgoing President Andrzej Duda, supported by the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS). Numerous lawyers, politicians and journalists have warned of the risk of fraud in the postal ballot and of violations of the Constitution and the Electoral Code... [Read more](#)

Foundation :

The world after coronavirus

Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Chairman of the Foundation, is one of the speakers in a webinar organised by Diálogo, a Franco-Spanish friendship association, on the world after the health crisis, on 21 April at 4 pm... [Read more](#)



Health crisis seen from ... A panorama of Europe's battle to counter the virus



All European Union Member States are concerned by Covid-19, to varying degrees. How have they coped? How have their health systems adapted? What have their responses been to the economic shock caused by the pandemic? The Foundation wishes to share the feelings of Europeans who are fighting the virus in their own countries. These testimonials are neither exhaustive nor academic; they are lived and human. Let's get to know each other better. First steps: Spain, Finland, Portugal and Romania... [Read more](#)

COVID-19: European response, a full picture



Faced with the health and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the European Union is trying to deploy the various means at its disposal. In order to react and show resilience for the future, its ability 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, which we update regularly... [Read more](#)

Coronavirus :

European Parliament resolution for recovery



In a resolution voted on 17 April, MEPs called for an ambitious recovery plan based on digital investment and green transition, financed by a reinforced long-term budget (MFF), existing EU funds and financial instruments and by recovery obligations guaranteed by the EU budget. They called for the creation of a European Solidarity Fund of at least €50 billion to finance national health systems and for the EU's health competences to be strengthened. They also expressed their criticism of recent reforms in Hungary and Poland... [Read more](#)

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National measures in view of deconfinement



In Germany, contact restrictions are being extended until 3 May, but shops with a maximum surface area of 800 m² were allowed to reopen on 20 April. In Belgium, the measures have been extended until 3 May inclusive, but DIY stores and garden centres have been allowed to reopen. In Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has asked Parliament to extend the confinement measures until 9 May, but children under the age of 12 will be able to leave their homes from 27 April. In Poland, the government has presented a 4-stage plan to return to normalcy from 20 April with the reopening of parks and forests, places of worship and shops with a surface area not exceeding 100 m². In the United Kingdom, the government announced on 16 April the extension of confinement for a minimum of 3 weeks. In France, where measures are in place until May 11, the government will present a de-confinement plan by the end of the month... [Read more](#)

Measures to support the economy



In France, the National Assembly adopted a €110 billion recovery plan on 18 April, which is due to be examined by the Senate on 21 April. In Germany, the reopening of certain shops, particularly those with a surface area of more than 800 m², on 20 April, should allow the economy to begin to recover. In the United Kingdom, the government announced on 16 April a loan programme for large companies and a relaxation of the competition rules for the dairy industry. On 14 April the Spanish government authorised the postponement of tax returns for the month of April for SMEs and the self-employed. On 16 April, the Polish Diet adopted a new 11 billion zloty (€2.64 billion) anti-crisis shield to support businesses"... [Read more](#)

Guidelines on the lifting of confinement measures



On 15 April the Commission published its guidelines on the lifting of confinement measures in the Union. It recommends lifting the measures only if the epidemiological situation in the countries has

improved, they are able to carry out mass screening and health systems are no longer under strain. Once this situation has been reached, it recommends a gradual lifting of the confinement measures and increased coordination with the other Member States... [Read more](#)

Rules and good practice regarding tracking apps



On 16 April, the Commission published its "toolbox" of rules and best practices for the implementation of applications for tracking people infected with the coronavirus. It stresses the importance of respecting European rules on privacy and data collection, the voluntary nature of the installation of applications, coordination with health authorities and the anonymisation of the data collected... [Read more](#)

Guidelines regarding testing kits



The Commission published its guidelines for in vitro diagnostic testing of COVID-19 on April 15. These guidelines recall the legal framework governing the tests and aim to help Member States to use them effectively as part of their national strategies, in particular in preparation for the lifting of confinement. The Commission stresses the need for European collaboration on test validation and sharing of results, for example through the establishment of a network of reference laboratories... [Read more](#)

Aid to fishermen and farmers



On 14 and 16 April respectively, the Council and the Commission approved financial aid for the fisheries and aquaculture sector and for the agri-food sector whose activities have been seriously affected by the coronavirus. They propose relaxing the conditions for access to storage aid. Advances on payments will be increased from 50% to 70%... [Read more](#)

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Economic repercussions of the crisis and response



Economic and finance ministers met on 16 April to discuss the measures taken in response to the crisis caused by the coronavirus and the rapid implementation of these measures, in particular the Temporary Support Instrument for Mitigating Unemployment Risks in Emergencies (SURE). Ministers stressed the importance of bank lending and banks were invited to refrain from distributing dividends. The procedure for the European semester should also be simplified... [Read more](#)

Health: towards a joint European strategy



On April 15, health ministers discussed the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, they exchanged views on the issue of deconfinement and the need to take coordinated measures at European level, depending on the capacities of the Member States' health systems and the development of the pandemic... [Read more](#)

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The challenges of e-learning



Education ministers discussed on 15 April the adaptation of their education systems to the coronavirus pandemic. In particular, they discussed national e-learning plans and the difficulties encountered, as well as national plans for the end of the school and university year... [Read more](#)

Guidelines on asylum and return policy



On 17 April the Commission adopted new guidelines on the application of asylum rules and return procedures in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. The registration and processing of applications should be continued, while individual interviews could be organised by videoconference. Quarantine should be proportionate and non-discriminatory. The Commission also encouraged the continuation of relocations and returns... [Read more](#)

Meeting of G7 leaders

On April 16, G7 leaders met to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic. Recalling the need for a coordinated international response, the G7 focused on economic measures to support trade and investment and restore growth and jobs. They called on global



economic organisations, such as the IMF, G20 and the World Bank, to support its initiatives. On health, they reaffirmed their support for the World Health Organization... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of G20 Finance Ministers



G20 finance ministers and central bank presidents agreed on April 15 on a series of monetary and fiscal measures to limit the impact of Covid-19 on the global economy. In particular, the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the use of regional financing arrangements, and a partial suspension of the debt of the poorest countries. They stressed the need for coordinated action... [Read more](#)

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Respect of human rights in healthcare decisions



On 14 April, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the Bioethics Committee of the Council of Europe recalled in a declaration that decision-making in the medical field must continue to be guided by human rights principles. At a time when health professionals may find themselves confronted with extreme working conditions and ethical issues, the Committee recalls that the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine is the only binding international legal instrument in this field capable of guiding these decisions... [Read more](#)

Need to guarantee rescue at sea during the coronavirus



The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, called on 16 April on all European States to ensure the rescue at sea of migrants and their disembarkation, despite the coronavirus pandemic. She stressed that, with the disengagement of States, the capacity to rescue people in distress in the central Mediterranean is now insufficient and that the situation has been aggravated by the closure of ports in Italy and Malta. The Council of Europe also condemns the deportations to Libya, a country where migrants are victims of serious human rights violations... [Read more](#)

Recommendations regarding the inclusion of refugee healthcare workers in the fight to counter COVID-19



On 14 April, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Refugee Agency recommended that States include refugee health practitioners in the fight against Covid-19. The European Refugee Qualification Passport, which would allow refugees to certify that they have the necessary professional skills and experience, could enable them to assist national health professionals... [Read more](#)

OECD report on fiscal and budgetary policies to cope with the crisis



An OECD report published on 15 April on fiscal and budgetary measures in response to the epidemiological crisis underlines the importance of measures to protect businesses and support households and the poor. It also reiterates the need for expansionary fiscal policy and calls for an international consensus on post-crisis fiscal policy... [Read more](#)

Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers



NATO Defence Ministers took stock on 15 April of the coordination of the Alliance's military support to the fight against the coronavirus. They also discussed measures to identify and denounce acts of misinformation and propaganda. They stressed the importance of not allowing the health crisis to become a security crisis... [Read more](#)

Measures in Italy



National confinement will remain in place in Italy until May 3. On 20 April, the government postponed the date of the elections in 7 regions scheduled for 10 or 31 May, which are now scheduled to take place between 15 September and 15 December. It also extended to 240 days the period of vacancy allowed before holding a by-election to the House or the Senate... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Meeting of Trade Ministers



On April 16, trade ministers discussed new measures concerning export authorization measure for personal protective equipment and the Foreign Investment Control Commission's guidelines on foreign investment control. They also discussed the Union's role in the global management of the crisis, in particular in the G7 and G20, and were briefed by Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan on the state of play of the discussions on the multiparty interim dispute settlement agreement... [Read more](#)

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Revision of the Union's 2020 Budget



On 14 April, the Council adopted the Commission's proposal for a revision of the EU's 2020 budget. The budget will therefore increase by €3.57 billion and almost all of the remaining budget for the current year will be used to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. It will finance certain measures taken to deal with the coronavirus: the RescEU civil protection mechanism and the emergency support instrument. It will also help Greece to cope with the migratory pressure it is undergoing, and Albania, which will suffer an earthquake in 2019... [Read more](#)

Greenlight to WTO's interim appeal arbitration arrangement



On 15 April, the Council approved the establishment of a multi-stakeholder interim appeal mechanism to overcome the deadlock in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Appellate Body. This mechanism was decided by 16 states outside the Union, including China, Brazil and Canada... [Read more](#)

Adoption of the Unified Classification for Sustainable Finance



On 16 April the Council adopted the regulation establishing a unified classification for the development of sustainable finance. This "green taxonomy" is intended to achieve the €180 billion annual investment that the Commission considers necessary for the ecological transition, by encouraging private investment in projects classified as sustainable. The regulation will enter into force after its adoption by the Parliament... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

75.9 billion € in public development aid in 2019



On 17 April, the Commission announced that the Union and its Member States have given €75.9 billion in official development aid in 2019, of which €19.8 billion will come directly from the EU budget. This represents 55% of the world's official development aid and makes the EU the world's largest donor. The Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, regrets however that the amount of development aid has been falling since 2016 and called on the Member States to be more generous... [Read more](#)

Court of Auditors :

Report on the cost of the cohesion policy



In a report on the implementation of cohesion policy published on 16 April, the Court of Auditors estimates that the administrative costs of this policy, which accounts for more than a third of the Union's budget, are "relatively low". However, it considers that there is little data available to assess the amount of savings linked to the simplification of its operation... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Report on counterfeiting during the pandemic



On 17 April, Europol published a report on counterfeiting during the pandemic, noting several ways in which counterfeiters are trying to profit from the crisis. The agency points out that most counterfeit goods are available on the web, and few on the dark web. Users are advised to beware of substandard food and pharmaceutical products... [Read more](#)

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Decrease in migration on the external borders in March



In March, the number of border crossings detected was halved, with approximately 4,650 crossings recorded, according to a Frontex Agency report published on 16 April. Half of these were in the eastern Mediterranean, involving Afghan, Syrian and Turkish asylum seekers. The biggest decrease was in the central Mediterranean, down 88% compared with the previous month. In the first quarter of 2020, however, crossings increased by 26% compared to the same period in 2019... [Read more](#)

ECHR :

Icelandic judge, Robert Spano, elected President



On 20 April, the 47 judges of the European Court of Human Rights elected Icelandic Judge Robert Spano as President of the institution. Judge at the Court since 2013 and Vice-President since May 2019, he will succeed Greek judge Linos-Alexandre Siciliano on 18 May for a three-year term... [Read more](#)

IMF :

Severe recession in view



In its World Economic Outlook published on 14 April, the IMF forecasts a contraction of the world economy by 3% in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, and by 7.5% for the euro zone. In response, it has called for the impact of the virus to be limited through increased health care spending, broad economic, fiscal and financial policies to help affected households and businesses, and above all close multilateral cooperation... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Drop in inflation



According to figures published by Eurostat on 17th April annual inflation in the EU was 1.2% in March compared with 1.6% in February. Euro-zone annual inflation was 0.7% in March, down from 1.2% in February. The lowest rates were recorded in Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Portugal (0.1%), and the highest rates were observed in Hungary and Poland (3.9%)... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Immersion in the Casa Batllo



The Casa Batlló, one of Antoni Gaudí's four houses in Barcelona is opening its doors for a virtual immersive visit floor by floor... [Read more](#)

Classic Weimar in digital format

KLASSIK STIFTUNG WEIMAR The Classical Weimar Foundation offers digital resources and virtual tours of the places it manages. For example: the Anna Amalia Library in 3D, paintings from the 15th to 18th centuries, exhibitions on Friedrich Nietzsche or on the influence of Rome on Goethe's work... [Read more](#)

Imaginary Bourges Spring



The Printemps de Bourges festival is taking place this year online, from April 21st to 26th, on the theme of "Le Printemps imaginaire". Artists who should have been performing live on stage will take part in "creations, covers, texts, fantasies" which will be broadcast via social media... [Read more](#)

Dublin from home



Visit Dublin has grouped together the main tourist attractions of the city for you to discover from the comfort of your own home. Lovers of art and history can take a stroll through the Irish Emigration Museum or the National Museum. Readers will appreciate the Chester Beatty Library, and exhibition enthusiasts will be happy to explore the Irish Museum of Modern Art or the National Gallery... [Read more](#)

Virtual visit of the Pszczyna Castle



The Pszczyna Castle Museum in Silesia offers an interactive virtual tour allowing visitors to explore the entire building, including a cabinet of miniatures, apartments and an armoury... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



20th-24th April 2020

Negotiations between the European Union and the UK



21st April 2020

Sports Ministers



22nd April 2020

Foreign Affairs Ministers

European Affairs Ministers



23rd April 2020

European Council



27th April 2020

Ministers responsible for Tourism

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