



## **Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel, following the EU Leaders' videoconference on COVID-19**

Brussels, 17 March 2020

Thank you Charles,

It was indeed very good to see how the Member States strongly endorsed the packages we have brought forward over the last days – it is the package on borders; the package on the economy; on the joint public procurement we have; and of course including the research part. So it was good to see that it was a full approval on the side of the Member States.

To go into a few of these topics more deeply: Indeed, one of the first topics was the implementation of the temporary entry restrictions on the external borders. So we got a lot of support by the Member States. It is up to them now to implement – they said they will immediately do that, this is good in order to have an unanimous and united approach what the external borders are concerned. There was a lot of approval what our proposal is concerned.

A big topic today were of course also the internal borders and consequently the blockages there. And here, it is absolutely crucial that we unblock the situation, because we know that too many people are stranded within the European Union and have a problem to go back home. They have to be supported to go back home.

And of course, we have a lot of traffic jam of lorries transporting goods. The flow of goods has to be swift, we need these goods for the functioning of the internal market. And therefore, there was a broad welcome concerning the guidelines we issued yesterday, that were discussed yesterday in the Justice and Home Affairs Council. So big approval for the so-called 'green lanes', fast track lanes, mainly for the flow of goods.

But we have also to make sure that the commuters can go back and forth where they live, or where they work. There was an impressive example from Luxembourg: The Prime Minister of Luxembourg said very clearly that it is for Luxembourg essential that they have the commuters coming back and forth, because the majority of the health workers in the hospitals are living either in France or in Germany and have to commute swiftly and it cannot take them hours to go to work or back home. So it is important that we fix that situation here. Same goes for the lorries: My Commissioners are in constant contact with the respective ministers of the different Member States in order to solve that now. We have the guidelines, there was approval for the guidelines and they have to be implemented now.

One point that was very positive as well: We had been asked to set up a group of experts – virologists, epidemiologists – to give us advice and we had the first meetings and it was good to see that they fully approve in their recommendation what the measures for – the term is 'social distancing' are concerned. So it is absolutely correct on this evidence-based and scientific-based approach to have these measures: to slow down the spread of the virus, to make sure that we have no public gatherings, that universities and schools are closed, that entertainment places are closed. Because we want people, in this case, not to have contact with each other so that we can reduce the speed of the spread of the virus, and therefore reduce the pressure on the health sector and the patients that have to be treated.

We launched today public procurement for gloves and masks, and yesterday for respiratory ventilators. 24 Member States are participating – that is good. The companies have now six days to tender and then, the Member State can immediately sign up the contract the day after the tender is closed within the next six days.

We are working also with the industry throughout Europe to ramp up the production of these scarce goods, so concerning the personal protective equipment, but also the ventilators that are desperately needed.

And finally, on Friday, indeed, we launched a strong economic package. This too was unanimously endorsed by the Member States. Friday feels already quite a while ago, because since Friday, we see that things have gotten even more serious. The situation has worsened, the economic situation is extremely serious and therefore all the measures that have been taken on the health side, which are

correct to contain the virus, we see that they have a huge impact on our economy.

This is an external shock and it hits the whole world. We have never had that before. The enemy is a virus and now we have to do our utmost to protect our people and to protect our economies. Since last Friday, we are working on all fronts to deliver on the ground. First, we are right now finalising the new Temporary Framework for state aid that will provide very high flexibility to Member States to support, for example, their companies. Second, it was good to see that yesterday the Eurogroup welcomed our readiness to activate the general escape clause. We are working on it and will come forward with a proposal to the Council in the next days.

And let me stress once more, we are ready to do everything that is required. We will not hesitate to take additional measures as the situation evolves.

Thank you.

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