

EPP Presidency Statement

EPP proposal on the COVID-19 challenge: Calling for EU
Health Sovereignty

11 June 2020

Faced with a global public health threat, we need effective action at the EU-level and in member states, in line with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity and based on the competencies as defined by the EU Treaty. EU health policy – like all EU policies – should focus on areas where a true European added value can be generated.

More than ever, it is necessary for the EU to show its ability to act and draw the right conclusions from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We must jointly strengthen our preparedness and resilience for the benefit of the general population and the healthcare workers on the frontlines. In challenging times like these, solidarity between member states and swiftly- developed and well-coordinated approaches at the EU- level, for example on border regimes and international travel, data collection and exchange including tracing apps, testing strategies as well as the development of therapies, are needed.

Mitigating the further spreading of the virus is a precondition for a lasting economic recovery. Public health and a strong economy are mutually dependent, as improving the resilience of our health systems is an investment in the future economic prosperity.

The very nature of a global health crisis calls for decisive and concrete EU-level action in the health sector, leading to better EU capabilities in crisis prevention and crisis management. Member states and EU institutions should work closely together towards an EU that is capable of empowering member states to prevent and manage future health crises in a more coordinated manner, while becoming less dependent on others. In other words, what we need is EU Health Sovereignty.

In order to achieve EU Health Sovereignty, three areas of action are key to creating added value for EU citizens:

i. Avoiding future shortages of critical medicinal products

The COVID-19 pandemic has painfully reminded us how the dependence on the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) for critical medicinal products in the countries outside the EU can threaten the functionality of health systems in the EU and the provision of essential medicinal products for EU citizens. Having seen the production for those substances move abroad mainly for economic reasons, EU Health Sovereignty calls for a concerted action to incentivise the relocation of production within our common borders as well as a coordinated approach to strategic EU-level stockpiling of essential medicines and medicinal products, and to the development and procurement of available and affordable vaccines. Companies should be encouraged to diversify their production to ensure that certain critical pharmaceutical substances are partially produced within the EU. President von der Leyen's global coronavirus response with the aim of universal access to affordable coronavirus vaccination, treatment and testing, that has already mobilised €9.8 billion in pledges, is a great example of such a joint approach. The pharmaceutical strategy to be proposed by the European Commission, as well as the announced EU4Health Programme, will identify areas for action and provide concrete solutions at all appropriate levels.

ii. Improving access to and availability of health data

In order to foster world-leading innovation, research and development in the area of health, the availability of and the access to data is vital to the success of research in the fields of inter alia vaccines, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. EU Health Sovereignty requires us to overcome the fragmentation of data and to create a real European Health Data Space, enabling EU-wide eHealth and interoperability of health data, to enhance joint research and crisis preparedness in the EU,

while respecting European data protection standards. By that we bring Big Data to its true meaning and bring forward a more digital EU in the area of health.

iii. Strengthening EU's role in global health

Successful action at the global level requires the EU to work on a common position and to speak with one voice to the outside world. European Health Sovereignty requires member states and EU institutions to live up to the Union's potential at the global stage and to better align the enormous financial contributions to global health with its political influence. For example, the EU needs strengthened agencies, like the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to effectively cooperate with partner institutions like Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US. The EU also needs to have a much stronger voice in institutions such as the WHO. At the same time, the EU should continue to address the pandemic and its consequences globally, in particular in Africa and the EU's neighbourhood, and help the most vulnerable countries on the basis of international cooperation and solidarity, such as the reinforced EU support for the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership.

Next Generation EU, an ambitious proposal of the European Commission, is a crucial step towards Europe's recovery and its swift and convincing adoption must be the top priority for the European Parliament and the European Council. In this regard, EU Health Sovereignty should build upon the pillars of the new EU-4Health Programme.

Better preparing the EU for future health emergencies, enabling it to react quickly and decisively as well as reduce dependencies on third countries in the area of health must be the key lesson from the current pandemic so that the EU can play a crucial role in protecting health and the well-being of our citizens. Only then will we emerge stronger from this crisis.

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**If you have any question
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