S&D Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament

07 May 2020
Brussels

Dear President Ursula von der Leyen,
Dear President Charles Michel,
Dear Prime-Minister Andrej Plenković,

Europe is facing an unprecedented health crisis. While the EU has used all the public health tools at its disposal during this time, they are being tested to their limits. Tragically it is clear that Member States' healthcare systems can be easily overwhelmed by COVID19. We need stronger EU tools to protect public health, and more resilient, better funded and equally accessible healthcare systems in every EU Member State.

Never again can we allow doctors and nurses to be exposed to such high risk and be forced to make decisions on who can and cannot receive healthcare. Therefore, S&D calls for the urgent creation of a European Health Union.

Member States should carry out stress tests of their healthcare systems, to evaluate their ability to handle pandemics, as well as to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goal of universal health coverage. Based on the results of these stress tests the Commission should propose minimum standards which would act as a baseline for quality European healthcare systems.

COVID19 was the first big test of the EU's Joint Procurement Mechanism, which has been used to procure personal protective equipment, ventilators, testing kits and medicines. This is an excellent tool which avoids competition between Member States, and enables equal access to the medicines and devices across Europe. However the process was too slow and S&D wants to see a stronger, faster joint procurement mechanism to respond to epidemics, but also for expensive new treatments, rare diseases or new antibiotics.

We also call for a European Health Response Mechanism which is ready to respond to health crises. It should formalise some of the ad-hoc tools and guidelines that have been set up during the current crisis, such as the expert advisory panel and guidelines on cross border treatment of patients and deployment of healthcare workers. It should build on the stockpiling and emergency response capabilities we have under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. We need to be prepared to respond more robustly and with European solidarity to a future pandemic.
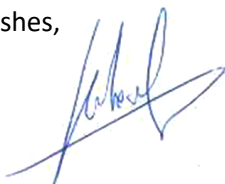
For this we will also need stronger EU health agencies. While ECDC and EMA are doing a fantastic job, their resources and remits need to be expanded and new complementary EU health agencies could be envisioned. Alongside this we will have proposals to improve

European health research, the resilience and security of the European health industry, and to improve health and safety standards in the workplace.

The right to physical and mental health is a fundamental human right. Every person, without discrimination, has the right to access modern and comprehensive healthcare. We have to safeguard citizens' wellbeing not only during this current crisis but also in the aftermath. We will publish our detailed proposals next week, which we hope can serve as a basis to begin common work to create a European Health Union.

It is time to set up a European Health Union. If not now, when?

Best wishes,

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President - Group of the Alliance of Progressives and Democrats in the European Parliament

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