

COVID-19 EU Briefing 09 July 2020

Synopsis

Standing ovations for German Chancellor Angela Merkel after her speech in the European Parliament, her first visit abroad after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout her speech she tried to connect her biography of a struggle for basic rights with the past and future of the EU and pointed out the responsibilities of the European Parliament in the progress and that of all Member States in finding compromises regarding the Recovery Fund and the MFF. Meanwhile, a trend seems to establish itself that some Member States return to local lockdowns, quarantines for travellers, or even border closings for certain countries as several new spikes in cases can be seen throughout Europe.

General

Recovery

Recovery Fund

- **Politico** reported that a key issue for the Netherlands surrounding the recovery fund is governance, and specifically the unanimous agreement required in order to disburse grants and loans. The Netherlands want to protect this attribute of funding which align to current ESM rules.
- **Politico** also reported that the German Council Presidency's proposal for governance of the recovery fund foresees "the Council acting by qualified majority on a Commission proposal."
- In the **European Parliament [debate](#)** on the EU budget and recovery, most MEPs concluded that the Commission's proposals for the long-term budget and recovery are the minimum acceptable for Parliament.
- The EU Recovery Fund must be approved before the end of July, **Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte** told a press conference after meeting Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez.

Health

- In a debate on the EU's future public health strategy with **Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides** and the Council, **MEPs** in the plenary session [highlighted](#) the need to draw the right lessons from the COVID-19 crisis. Several members argued for the need to give the EU a far stronger role in the area of health, a role that must include measures to tackle shortages of affordable medicines and protective equipment as well as support to research.
- **EIOPA** has [issued](#) a statement calling on insurance companies to review their product oversight and governance measures because of the potential impact the COVID-19 pandemic can have on products and their utility for customers. It is vitally important that insurance companies place the fair treatment of customers at the heart of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agriculture

- **Euractiv** [reports](#) that Massimiliano Giansanti, Head of Italy's farmers' organisation, Confagricoltura, has stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted key issues within the European agricultural system, such as food self-sufficiency and food safety.

Digital Taxation

The **Socialist and Democrats Group** in the European Parliament have [published](#) a roadmap for 'Tax Justice to Foster a Post-Pandemic Recovery'. They have called for 'fairer taxation of highly digitalised companies and tech giants'. While they call for a global agreement, it states that the EU should agree on its own framework if no global deal be reached by the end of 2020.

German Council Presidency

- **German Chancellor Angela Merkel** has given a speech in the European Parliament, presenting the programme of its Council Presidency. Throughout her speech it was obvious that she wants to leave behind a stronger and more cooperative Europe. She focused on five priorities during the next six months:
 - Basic rights (her own main priority), cooperation (highest priority for a stronger and more united Europe), climate change (call for 50-55% reduction of CO2 until 2030), digitalisation (call to fight disinformation), and the responsibility of Europe in the world (progress with North Macedonia and maybe even Albania in the enlargement process).

Member States

Belgium

- **Belgian Health Minister Maggie De Block** [described](#) the "simplistic" use of COVID-19 statistics leading to "the comparison between countries seems to be reduced to a sport competition".
- Belgium will issue a formal travel ban to areas in the Schengen zone that have been put back in lockdown and are considered a high health risk area.

Austria

- Travellers from Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania, would have to undergo a 14-day quarantine before entering the country.

Romania

- On Wednesday (8 July), the number of confirmed coronavirus infections in the past 24 hours rose to 555, the highest daily figure since the start of the pandemic.
- However, the Romanian government announced that it does not intend to introduce new restrictions.