

Croatian Presidency of the  
Council of the European Union

**High-Level Videoconference**  
**European Research & Innovation response to the ongoing disease**  
**outbreak caused by the novel coronavirus**

**7 April 2020, 16h00**

On 31 December 2019, a cluster of pneumonia cases was reported in Wuhan in the Hubei Province in China. On 9 January 2020, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control reported a novel coronavirus as the causative agent of this outbreak.

The COVID-19 disease caused by the novel coronavirus is rapidly spreading worldwide and the number of cases is rising at an increasing pace in Europe. In this regard and in order to protect our citizens, it is necessary to act in a **united, coherent and synergistic manner**. Coordinated measures will create the necessary synergies and enable immediate response to the crisis the entire world is facing.

The European Commission has already prepared a research and innovation response<sup>1</sup> including: i) funding for vaccine development, treatment, diagnostics and market deployment of COVID-19-relevant products; ii) support for cooperation and information exchange at international level to ensure synergies and avoid duplication of efforts, iii) increasing cooperation with European agencies (European Medicines Agency, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and others). In addition, Member States have also made significant investments at national and regional levels. On 26 March 2020, the EU leaders recognised research and innovation as one of the five main strands where efforts and investments need to continue in order to help overcome the crisis.

The role of R&I is of great importance as is the role of scientists who, now more than ever, have the strength to reach out to people and communicate with the wider public. As policy-makers, we should do our utmost to facilitate this process and ensure that science drives all policy decisions and measures presented to the wider community.

Throughout a series of exchanges of views between the Member States and the Commission, organised by the Commission services in the last weeks, Member States called for a more flexible use of structural funds, launching of a new public-public partnership on coronavirus, coordinated R&I approaches to

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/european-commissions-action-coronavirus\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/european-commissions-action-coronavirus_en)

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common challenges, mobilisation of research infrastructures, the need for sharing reliable information and results and the importance of open science and open innovation. The urgency for developing effective vaccine and medicines was emphasized, as well as the need to protect healthcare professionals and others at the front line of handling the crisis. There has been a wide agreement that R&I is essential to address these issues and find an answer to the health, economic and social crisis. Furthermore, it was pointed out that short, medium and long term research and innovation efforts related to COVID-19 and future epidemics should continue. The need to improve coordination between Member States, as well as the need for evidence-based policy making, were highlighted as crucial.

As a follow-up to these discussions, the attached *Action Plan* identifies 10 priority R&I actions that can be executed in a relatively short timeframe. In addition to this, the Union must also step up its efforts in addressing the medium and long-term impact of this crisis on our societies and economies. Scientists with background in various areas should be included in the whole process and guide our decision-making.

The videoconference at the level of Ministers should provide a platform for further informal exchanges on possible research and innovation policy developments and measures to address the crisis and its effects in short, medium and long term, in cooperation with other EU policies. In order to structure the discussion, Ministers are invited to respond to the following questions:

- 1. Do you support the 10 priority actions identified in the Action Plan?**
- 2. What would be the best mechanism to coordinate and steer the overall short, medium and long-term R&I response? How do we ensure a greater role for scientists in our decision-making processes?**
- 3. How can other EU programmes and funds, primarily structural funds, be best used to boost investments in the R&I response to this crisis?**