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Proposal for

**ACTIONS FOR HANDLING ON-GOING COVID-19
PANDEMIC
&
FUTURE HEALTH CRISES**

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This proposal provides for a date of application as of 19th of April 2021 and is presented for a Union of 27 Member States.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND RATIONALE

1) Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be one of the biggest challenges that the EU has been facing since World War II.

As of the 17th of April 2021, the EU as a whole region has recorded an estimated 29,192,294 cases and 660,217 deaths.

In addition, the socio-economic impact of the EU was substantial as well, with GDP in the Q2 of 2020 falling by 13.9% compared with the same quarter of 2019.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on mental health. In Belgium “*prevalence of anxiety (depression) doubled, increasing from an average value of 11% (9.5%) in 2018 to a value of 23% (20%) in April 2020, with younger, unemployed people, and people living alone showing higher rates of anxiety and depression*” (Ciucci, 2020, p. 5).

France has not been an exemption with almost 101 000 deaths and a contraction of GDP of 9.5% in 2020.

In addition, a report published by Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection in December 2020 (Essadek and Rabeyron, 2020, 277: 392-392) investigated the mental health impact on French students during COVID 19 pandemic. Results showed that 43% of the more than 8000 students sampled reported to have suffered from depression and were in need of psychological health.

As one of the pillars of stability in the European Union France is determined not to allow for such a scenario to repeat itself in the future should we have additional health crises. Moreover, France is determined to have the EU come out of this pandemic even stronger than before.

Therefore, the framework for current & future action in times of health crisis is presented with a rather strong focus on a more coordinated, transparent and robust system.

2) General Principles

a) France will continue to support strong and unified response on the entire EU level in accordance with the Article 222 (1) of the TFEU: “*The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster.*”

b) France will furthermore continue to support ever-important role of the European Commission in handling the crisis in accordance with Article 6 of the TFEU:

The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be: inter alia: (a) protection and improvement of human health;

c) France will, however, insist that the Conditionality Principle be applied fairly throughout the EU for this legislature. Rule-Of-Law will be respected in terms of distribution of resources. Any deviation of the Rule-Of-Law principle will prompt immediate reaction from French representatives in the EU structure and appropriate action will be asked for.

PROPOSALS:

1) Digital Green Certificate

On 17th of March 2021, the EC has proposed creating Digital Green Certificate which could be obtained by doing one of the following:

- a) Being vaccinated by one of the EMA approved vaccines
- b) Receiving negative COVID 19 test
- c) Providing proof of the recent COVID 19 recovery

The Digital Green Certificate will have a QR code and is aimed to return some degree of normalcy in terms of movement of people.

There shall be no discrimination regardless of the way that Certificate is obtained and it is proposed to last only as a temporary measure until the WHO declares the end of the pandemic.

France will support this proposal as one of the ways to keep fighting the Corona virus but at the same time looking to ease movement of the people (European Commission - A, 2021).

2) Recovery Plan for Europe

This plan aims to be a pillar of the future framework for actions in handling the health crises.

It is the largest stimulus package ever produced and financed using the EU budget.

Total of 1.8 trillion euros will be assigned to help rebuild Europe making it greener, more digital and resilient to future crises.

In addition to NextGenerationEU which will provide 750 billion euros stimulus to assist with the immediate damage, the Plan will contain multiple other programs such as EU4Health, Horizon Europe, Just Transition Fund, Digital Europe Programme aiming to support modernization & robustness of the EU systems.

Unified R&D projects supported by this Plan will aim to increase the amount of innovation needed for the European society to combat future crises.

The Plan will encourage & help Member States to increase capacities and functionality of their health systems.

France will support this Plan but will have to insist on the Rule-Of-Law conditionality whereas Member States will receive benefits in accordance with their participation in funding

& respecting legal principles set forth by the Recovery Plan (European Commission - B, 2021).

3) Border Management

In terms of future crises handling, the EU should adopt a joint framework for Border Management.

In the event of an external threat appearing, the EU should impose immediate restriction of the external borders and non-discriminatory restriction of the inter-EU borders.

Proper communication is of the paramount importance in terms of restrictions and Member States should be encouraged to share information as soon as possible with the goal of a proper containment of any future outbreak.

4) EC having the authority to intervene directly in the most affected regions

France will oppose unchallenged authority of the EC intervention.

According to the EU Health Policy: *“EU countries hold primary responsibility for organising and delivering health services and medical care. EU health policy therefore serves to complement national policies, and to ensure health protection in all EU policies”* (European Commission - C, 2021).

In addition, if the EC would undertake this task, it would put more financial burden on it needed to be financed by the Member States.

Also, any failed intervention could prompt outrage and deterioration of trust in the EC & the EU.

It is therefore better that EC keeps its supervisory and advisory role.

5) European Commission having the authority to purchase and distribute the vaccines for the future pandemic on behalf of the Member States.

France will support the above-mentioned idea.

Referring to the Joint Procurement Scheme, EC shall have the authority to make agreements on behalf of the Member States.

Such a program will benefit EU countries as EC, representing a wide number of countries, shall have a better leverage position in negotiating than any State could have individually.

In addition, the program ought to be voluntary but similarly to the Recovery Plan, tied with the Rule-Of-Law Conditionality principle.

References:

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