
DODS EUM COVID-19 UPDATE

March 20 2020 State of Play



EU MONITORING

CONTENT

- **Introduction**
 - **Global situation**
 - **EU state of play**
 - **Member states measures**
- 

INTRODUCTION

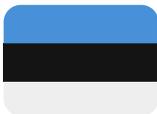
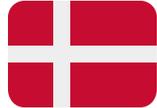
The COVID-19 crisis has rampaged across the European Union over the last two weeks leaving a very different Union in its wake. The European institutions have entered an effective lockdown, national borders have been re-erected and financial institutions are preparing for an economic slowdown to rival that of the 2008 financial crisis.

Initially accused of being slow to react, the European Union and its member states have sprung into action over the last seven days and launched a series of major countermeasures at both the Union and national level. These measures have touched issues across the board ranging from national lockdowns, to school closures, to new state aid measures to help those impacted by the crisis, to an injection of some 750 billion euros into the economy. Whilst the member states remain responsible for national health issues, COVID-19 and its impact across the board has meant that the EU has had to be involved.

The European Union and indeed the world is only at the start of this crisis which promises to go on for some months and it is certain that the situation will remain fluid for some time. This paper gives an insight to the measures taken at the European, national and global levels over the last week and is accurate at the time of writing. However, given the speed with which developments are proceeding, it is likely that the situation will have changed once again by the end of the weekend.

MEASURES IN EU COUNTRIES

Last updated: March 20 2020



GLOBAL REACTION

The **World Health Organisation** has been at the forefront of global efforts to combat the Coronavirus and on Friday, March 13, **launched** a COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, intended to raise funds to help countries respond to the pandemic. The WHO has also been giving daily briefings and situation reports. They have also sought to cooperate with other global institutions to coordinate efforts in particular sectors. With this in mind, the International Chamber of Commerce and the WHO **released** a joint statement calling for unprecedented private sector call to action to tackle COVID-19. The two organisation argue that “the COVID-19 pandemic is a global health and societal emergency that requires effective immediate action by governments, individuals and businesses. All businesses have a key role to play in minimising the likelihood of transmission and impact on society. Early, bold and effective action will reduce short- term risks to employees and long-term costs to businesses and the economy.”

Meanwhile, the G7 leaders spoke and issued a **joint statement** on March 16, in which they committed to coordinating on necessary public health measures to protect people at risk from COVID-19, taking measures to restore confidence, growth, and protect jobs, to support global trade and investment and to encouraging science, research, and technology cooperation. In terms of public health, the G7 leaders pledged to strengthen health systems in their own countries, and globally, and offered their full support to the WHO “in its global mandate to lead on disease outbreaks and emergencies with health consequences, leaving no geographical vacuum, and encourage all countries, international organizations, and the private sector to assist global efforts such as the Global Preparedness and Response Plan”. In terms of research cooperation, the G7 spoke of increasing joint research projects funded by both “public and private resources, and the sharing of facilities, towards rapid development, manufacture and distribution of treatments and a vaccine, adhering to the principles of efficacy, safety, and accessibility”. As for measures to combat the economic impact of the crisis, there was agreement on the need to use the full range of instruments available, including monetary and fiscal measures, as well as targeted actions, “to support immediately and as much as necessary the workers, companies, and sectors most affected”.

This G7 statement was **welcomed** by the Director-General of the WTO, Roberto Azevêdo who commented that he was heartened by governments' moves to introduce fiscal and monetary measures to prevent social lockdown from leading to large-scale business failure and job losses. He also commended the G7 statement for its emphasis on cooperation to fight the virus, from data-sharing and access to medical equipment to efforts to develop potential treatments and a vaccine. Encouraged by the G7 pledge to "address disturbances to international supply chains and continue our work to facilitate international trade", DG Azevêdo reassured that the WTO would do its part to support this work.

Going forward, the current lead of the G20, Saudi Arabia, plans to convene a virtual summit next week, bringing together the leaders from the Group of 20 major economies (G20) to address the coronavirus pandemic.



European Union

This week, in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 across Europe, the EU institutions reacted on several fronts on the issues of health, the economic impact, limits to the freedom of movement and how to ensure that goods continue to flow freely across the single market. The outbreak has caused severe disruptions to the workings of the European institutions. The European Commission has switched its attention solely to the issue of COVID-19 and has thus delayed numerous files that it was scheduled to put forward. It has also implemented teleworking, as have the other institutions. Meanwhile, the Council of the EU has also had to delay all non-essential meetings and has now begun holding informal Council meetings by videoconference. As for the European Parliament, all Committee and Plenary activity has been put on hold for the last few weeks. The Parliament is now planning on holding an emergency plenary session next week and is still investigating how to proceed in the coming weeks.

The European Council, made up of the Heads of State and Government, held a video conference in the evening of March 17, during which the emphasis was placed on citizens' health. To that end, the Council **highlighted** five main priorities:

- Limiting the spread of the virus
- Providing medical equipment
- Promoting research
- Tackling socio-economic consequences
- Assisting citizens stranded in third countries

In view of the extraordinary COVID 19 circumstances, and the need to ensure the urgent adoption of the 3 measures proposed by the Commission, European Parliament President Sassoli, in agreement with the Presidents of the political groups, decided, on March 19, to call an extraordinary European Parliament **plenary session on Thursday, 26 March**. For the forthcoming weeks and months, a **new meeting calendar** will be adopted by the Conference of Presidents, which will allow for Group and Committee meetings by remote participation

Healthcare

On the health front, the Commission and its agencies have been working to draft measures and find solutions to the new problems arising from the outbreak.

The European Commission **announced** on March 17 the creation of an **advisory panel** on **COVID-19** composed of epidemiologists and virologists from different Member States to formulate EU guidelines on science-based and coordinated risk management measures. The panel, which will be chaired by Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and co-chaired by Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, will provide advice to the Commission on the following:

- Formulation of response measures to be addressed to all Member States in line with the different stages of the epidemic in the EU as a whole and taking into account particular Member State contexts;
- Identification and mitigation of significant gaps, inconsistencies or inadequacies in measures taken or to be taken to contain and manage the spread of COVID-19, including in clinical management and treatment, and overcome its impact;
- Prioritisation of health care, civil protection and other resources as well as support measures to be organised or coordinated at EU level;
- Subsequently, recommendation of policy measures for addressing and mitigating long-term consequences of COVID-19.

On the same day, the ECDC **published** guidance for health system contingency planning during widespread transmission of SARS-CoV-2 with high impact on healthcare services. The document aims to support public health preparedness planning and response activities when advising healthcare services on approaches on how to increase capacity for managing COVID-19 cases. Also that day, the European Commission **offered** up to €80 million of financial support to CureVac, a highly innovative German vaccine developer. CureVac had previously been **rumoured** to have been made an offer by US President Donald Trump to develop a vaccine that would only be made available on the American market.

On March 19, the European Commission **published** recommendations for best practices for **community measures**, as well as **testing strategies** to tackle the spread of COVID-19. A coordinated approach remains the Commission's priority, and it has asked that all member states apply these guidelines while taking national specificities into account. On the same day, the Commission also **announced** it had created the first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment, such as ventilators and protective masks to help EU countries in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stockpile will be hosted by one or several Member States, the hosting State will be responsible for procuring the equipment, and the Commission will finance 90% of the stockpile.

Managing the economic impact

On the financial side, the institutions kicked into high gear to stem the oncoming economic slowdown which has shocked markets since the crisis hit Europe.

On March 16, the **Eurogroup met** by video conference in order to take stock of the economic situation and adopted a **statement on the economic policy response** to the COVID-19 outbreak. Eurogroup President Mário Centeno **stated**: "We will protect our citizens and our currency, come what may and with everything we have got. Our commitment to provide support in this time of need is unlimited." Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni stressed that "there is a clear commitment [...] to take whatever further coordinated and decisive policy action is necessary, including fiscal measures, to support growth and employment."

On March 17, the **European Commission sent** to Member States a draft proposal for a State aid Temporary Framework to support the economy in the context of the outbreak. The new Temporary Framework, which is expected to be put in place in the next few days, is aimed to enable four types of aid: i) direct grants and selective tax advantages, ii) State guarantees for loans taken by companies from banks, iii) subsidised public loans to companies, and iv) safeguards for banks that channel support to the real economy.

On March 18, **EU Ambassadors agreed**, without amendments, the Council's position on two legislative proposals, which will release funds to tackle the effects of the outbreak. Under the first proposal, via the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, €37 billion will be made available to Member States; €8 billion of investment liquidity will be released from unspent pre-financing in 2019 for programmes under the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Access to €29 billion of structural funding across the EU for 2020 will be also provided under the measure. These proposals are now scheduled to be approved in an emergency European parliament plenary session next week.

Mitigating the closure of European borders

From the travel perspective, since March 16, a temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU is in place. In a **video message** on the subject, President von der Leyen stated that these restrictions would be in place for an initial period of 30 days, which can be prolonged as necessary.

Regarding the single market, On March 17, the Commission **released** guidelines for border management measures addressing member states to maintain the functioning of the Single Market for essential health, goods and services. On March 19, the Commission announced the launch of joint actions with the network of **national consumer protection** authorities at EU level (CPC), following an action started by the Italian consumer protection authority, with a view to addressing the rise in rogue traders selling false products online, which allegedly can prevent or cure the COVID-19 virus. On the same day, Internal Market Commissioner, Thierry Breton, **called on** the responsibility of streaming services, operators and users in order to prevent congestion and to ensure the open Internet in light of the increased demand for Internet capacity arising from the social distancing measures put in place across Europe to fight the Coronavirus pandemic.

On March 18, published **guidelines** on EU passenger rights in order to mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the same day, the Croatian Council Presidency convened EU Transport Ministers to hold an informal **high-level videoconference**. Given that the transport sector has been hit hard by a wide range of national pandemic containment measures, Transport Ministers together with the European Commission agreed to work closely to minimise traffic disruptions, especially for essential freight such as food and medicine. Ministers also discussed how to alleviate the negative impact on the transport and tourism sectors. They agreed that the response to COVID-19 should not exacerbate economic and social problems by blocking transport links.

On March 19, the **European Commission welcomed** Member States' support to minimise traffic disruptions in the EU. Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean, said: "It is time for concrete measures and strong coordination between Member States and we agreed to designate national contact points for enhanced coordination. I have asked that essential 'green corridors' be established to preserve the free circulation of goods and people who need to cross borders." **This decision was welcomed by the European Parliament's IMCO and TRAN Chairs.**

On the repatriation of EU European citizens stranded abroad, after being emphasised by multiple institutions throughout the week, on March 19 and the **European Commission** provided and **update** on the situation. All flights costs will have a contribution of up to 75% by the European Commission. Both High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, with the **European External Action Service** and the **Emergency Response Coordination Centre**, are working to support efforts to boost the repatriation of EU citizens from third countries.



AUSTRIA

Austria being a neighbour to Italy has been hit hard by the Corona pandemic with more than 2,000 confirmed cases. On March 11 the Government ordered the closure of all universities and schools. As new confirmed cases continued to explode, the Government announced a nationwide lockdown on March 16. Border checks have been reintroduced, public gatherings of any size have been banned, and all non-essential travel is forbidden. The Austrian Government **announced** on March 18 a €38 billion support package for struggling businesses, especially in the tourism industry, to ensure their liquidity. On 15 March, the Austrian Parliament **decided** on the necessary legal provisions and financing of special “Corona short-time work scheme” (€400 million).

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BULGARIA

On March 13, Bulgaria **declared** a state of emergency for one month until April 13. The Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs **called** on Bulgarian citizens to refrain from traveling abroad unless absolutely necessary. Public places, including schools, shopping centres, cinemas, restaurants, and other places of business were closed, and all sports events are suspended. The Ministry of Health **announced** that citizens from a number of countries will be prohibited from entering Bulgaria starting 00:00 on March 18. Parliament will debate and vote on further measures on March 20.

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BELGIUM

Since March 18, several **strict measures** were put in place in Belgium, aimed to keep people at home as much as possible. Only for essential work, travel and outdoor exercise, are people allowed to go outside. Larger gatherings are forbidden and one is advised to keep a reasonable distance. Companies, irrespective of their size, are obliged to organise working from home for every position where this is possible, without exception. Key industries and essential services are exempted though. Non-essential shops and retail outlets will remain closed, with the exception of food shops, pharmacies, pet food shops and newsagents. Outdoor markets are shut down. Public transport should be organised in such a way as to ensure social distancing, while non-essential travel outside Belgium is prohibited. The measures are in place until April 5 included.

On March 6, Belgium's federal government adopted **10 measures** in support of businesses and the self-employed suffering from the COVID crisis. The measures include an extension of the 'temporary unemployment due to force majeure', increased unemployment benefits, certain exemptions from tax payments or social contributions and specific derogations from late payment fines, amongst other social measures.

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CROATIA

On 11 March, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković held a meeting with ministers and members of National Headquarters to discuss new measures and activities to prevent spreading of the coronavirus. As of March 16, Croatia closed schools and universities for at least two weeks. The following day Prime Minister Plenković announced the closure of all shopping centres, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and other facilities. On 14 March, Croatia closed all borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four days later, it was **announced** that 27 border crossing stations on the border with Slovenia would be closed. Croatia also imposed price control measures on products, including milk and soap, as well as for medical supplies.

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CYPRUS

On Monday, March 15, the Cypriot Council of Ministers held a meeting with President Anastasiades, who **announced** new measures to contain the spread of coronavirus. The Cypriot government decided to allocate the amount of 100 million euros to reinforcing the public health sector, to suspend the operations of businesses of the private sector and the adoption of a comprehensive exceptional financial Support Programme for working people, small and medium-sized enterprises and in general for all Cypriot businesses. The “Support Programme” that has been formulated is structured and specific, both in range as well as in expenditure, and it is valued at 700 million euros, an amount equal to the 3% of the GDP. With regard to the public sector, the Ministers have been authorized to proceed to the structuring of an emergency operations plan. In addition, President Anastasiades said that students who opt to stay in their places of study in Cyprus will be granted a 750 euros allowance.

The Cyprus Government spokesperson, Kyriakos Kousios, released a statement yesterday noting that “the Government has vehemently denied that it intends to impose a ban on movement of citizens or the complete suspension of business or office operations, much more of supermarkets and grocery stores. Under the circumstances, as they are currently assessed, such drastic measures are not required or justified in any way.”

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CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic took an active approach to address the COVID-19 threat. On March 12, the Czech government **declared a state of emergency** for the upcoming 30 days. The country is in a complete lock-down: all schools and shops are closed, except for supermarkets, pharmacies, online shops and other necessary infrastructure. The free movement of people is restricted to the essential minimum. **A travel ban** is also in place: the Czech Republic reintroduced border controls (with Germany and Austria) and placed a 14 days obligatory quarantine for citizens returning back from risk countries. Since March 18, there is an **obligation to wear face masks** or other protective equipment in public. To reduce the economic impact, the government announced a series of reliefs for companies, SMEs and self-employed people, such as the postponement of the deadline for tax declaration, interest-free loans and other forms of compensation. Speaking after a cabinet meeting on March 18, Prime Minister Babiš **told journalists** that the Czech government could support Czech businesses with CZK 100 billion in direct aid and CZK 900 in guarantees. Škoda Auto, one of the biggest employers in the Czech Republic, **has closed** Czech plants due to coronavirus pandemic for initial period of minimal two weeks on March 19.

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DENMARK

Denmark has put in place a number of measures to restrict the COVID19 spread and its consequences. The country has entered a phase of "domestic lockdown" since last Wednesday and people are encouraged to work from home. From March 14 until April 13, Danish borders are closed, except for transport of goods, people with an important reason for visiting, foreigners leaving Denmark, and Danes and people with a residence permit returning to Denmark. To help Danes deal with the economic impact, Danish PM Mette Frederiksen **announced** that 2.6 bn of Danish kroner will be employed in an effort to prevent layoffs in private companies under financial pressures. The scheme will last three months and will see the Danish state co-financing 75% of salaries of employees, who would have otherwise been fired, paid monthly, while the private companies pay the remaining 25%. On Wednesday March 19, the Danish government also **declared** that it will start offering COVID19 take-home kits to collect samples.

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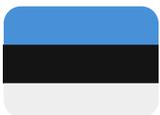
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ESTONIA

The government **declared** the **state of emergency** on March 12, banning all public gatherings, closing all cultural institutions, and implementing distance learning at schools. On March 15, additional restrictions were **introduced**, requiring that all sports venues be closed. As from March 17, a **temporary restriction** on border crossing for foreign nationals applies. Estonian citizens and residents, are still allowed to enter the country, but they are requested to stay in self-isolation for 14 consecutive days at the place of residence. On March 19, the government **announced** the introduction of a set of measures (worth at least EUR 2 billion) to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic emergency. Unless provided otherwise, the emergency measures are set to stay in place until May 1.

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FINLAND

The government **declared** a state of emergency on March 16, thereby providing for the shutting down of all schools and public facilities such as museums and libraries, as well as banning all public meetings and gatherings of more than 10 people. Border checks have been introduced, and the country is now preparing to close its borders: passenger transport to Finland will be suspended, with the exception of the return of Finnish citizens and persons residing in Finland, who will be asked to stay in quarantine-like conditions for two weeks. The **measures** are set to stay in place until April 13.

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FRANCE

On 14 March 2020, France **entered** the 3rd phase of the epidemic. The French Prime Minister has therefore ordered that all places open to the public and that are not essential services to be closed until further notice. French President Macron announced a **proposal** for an emergency bill against COVID-19, allowing the Government to declare the state of emergency. Regarding the economy, Minister Bruno Le Maire has presented a €45 billion support plan to help businesses stay afloat, as the government tabled on an economic recession in 2020. He **added** that the Government does not rule out nationalisations as major enterprises such as Air France, or Renault are struggling.

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GERMANY

Germany is one of Europe's hardest-hit states in the Corona pandemic with more than 16,500 confirmed cases (March 20). In an extraordinary nationwide TV address on March 18, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on citizens to work from home, stay inside, and keep a social distance to overcome the greatest challenge since the Second World War. From March 16 onwards, Germany restricted its border traffic with France, Austria, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Denmark. On the same day Bavaria declared a state of emergency. Crisis management and health policy are a competence of the federal states. The German Government **announced** on March 19 it will stand as guarantor for 'bridging' loans up to €460 billion in total. Further €40 billion in aid were promised for independent workers and micro-businesses. The German Parliament **passed** a law on March 13 which extends and facilitates access to the existing short-time working allowance. It also lightens the financial burden on businesses, and is valid retroactively from 1 March.

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GREECE

Last week the Greek government announced the **first set of measures** in response to the escalating coronavirus outbreak in Greece. The measures included the reinforcement of the Greek health system with an additional 200 million euros, the possibility of a special leave, of flexible working hours and/or remote working for the employees, the cost of which will be shared between the employer and the state, and finally the temporary suspension of tax and social security obligations for the enterprises that were forced to shut down by the state. On Thursday, March 19, the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, **announced** an additional 3 billion euros in measures to prop up the economy and help workers whose jobs are at risk as a result of shut down measures to contain the coronavirus epidemic. Mitsotakis said that the additional funds being earmarked from the revised budget will go toward expanding an 800-euro benefit for workers who lose their jobs due to businesses closing down, to those working for companies who suffer significant financial losses over the course of the health crisis. He also said that health and civil protection workers on the frontline of the battle against the new coronavirus will receive a special Easter bonus, while assuring private sector workers that their holiday bonus will be paid as usual.

Greece has already shut down commercial stores, schools, cinemas, bar and restaurants and gatherings of more than 10 people have been prohibited. Finally, the Greek government is expected to **announce** the suspension of all passenger flights to and from Greece, on Sunday, March 22, while the issue of imposing a full lockdown to the country will be re-evaluated during the weekend.

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HUNGARY

According to the latest data published on the official government information page, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has risen to 85, whereas the number of deceased is one. Following the declaration of the state of emergency on March 11, per government decree, as of March 17, Hungary closed all land borders to non-Hungarian citizens, with the exception of EEA citizens holding a residence permit. The government also ordered the closure of all entertainment venues and cultural institutions, whereas cafes, restaurants, and stores are subject to limited opening hours. This limitation does not apply to pharmacies, food, and drug stores. During a national address on March 18, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán **announced** a package of economy and job protection measures, including the suspension of principal and interest payment liabilities on loans. On March 19, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, announced the extension of the state of emergency, noting that the state of emergency could only remain in force for a period of 15 days, after which parliament's approval would be necessary for a further extension.

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IRELAND

In response to the crisis, Ireland has cancelled public events and festivals and closed all schools, colleges, childcare and other public facilities until at least March 29. The Irish government also **set up** an unemployment payment of 203 EUR per week - the COVID19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment - for those who incurred job losses due to the virus. The Department of Social Protection has asked employers to continue to pay workers at least the amount of 203 EUR, and that they will be subsequently refunded. The department specified on March 19 that employers who temporarily laid staff off and paid them over would not qualify for a refund.

The country's PM Leo Varadkar **pleaded** on Twitter on Monday to stop sharing unverified information on Whatsapp groups, in an effort to curb the spread of disinformation regarding COVID19.

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ITALY

As the first European country to be severely hit by the coronavirus pandemic, Italy has adopted **several measures** to try to contain the spread of the virus. The first measures applying to the entire national territory were adopted on March 9, when, via a **Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers** (Dpcm), the government established that any movement of natural persons should be avoided, “except for movements motivated by well-grounded work-related reasons or situations of need or movements for health reasons”. Education services, sporting events and competitions, as well as all other kinds of events, were suspended. Teleworking was encouraged. The shutting down of all commercial activities, except for pharmacies and groceries stores, was declared on March 11. On March 16, a new set of measures was **adopted**, most notably as buffer from the economic impact of the pandemic emergency. The new package thus **intervenes** in four core areas: additional funds and further strengthening of the National Health System, as well as of the Civil Protection and all other bodies involved in the management of the crisis; support to workers and employment; aid for families and SMEs, including access to credit; and suspension of tax payments and social security contributions.

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LATVIA

On March 14, the Latvian government **announced** new measures in light of the COVID19 emergency, suspending organised passenger traffic such as buses, trains and flights starting from Midnight on Monday 16 March. While it is still allowed, thus not encouraged, to arrange cross-border move in a private capacity (e.g. by car) in other Member States, the Latvian external EU border with Russia and Belarus will be shut to both organised public and private transport. In this light, Air Baltic has **suspended** all its flights until April 14, a measure that also applies to Air Baltic Estonian's operations.

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LITHUANIA

According to the latest data published on the official government **information page**, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has risen to 48. The tertiary (absolute preparedness) level of the civil protection system on the territory of the Republic of Lithuania was declared on March 14, whereas a two-week nationwide **quarantine regime** became effective at midnight on March 16. The Lithuanian Government **imposed** a number of restrictions regarding the cross-border and domestic movements of people and goods. Lithuanian citizens are barred from exiting the country, except citizens returning to their country of residence or work. Persons who have returned from foreign countries shall be subject to a 14 days isolation. In addition, all mass events are prohibited; all cafes, bars and restaurants are to provide takeaway services only; and all educational institutions have suspended their activities until March 27. On March 16, the Ministry of Finance **proposed** to allocate EUR 5 billion for the implementation of a package of measures aimed to provide support for public health and the national economy.

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LUXEMBOURG

In its efforts to combat the spread of the virus, Luxembourg has closed all schools, all non-food shops and restaurants. Prime Minister Xavier Bettel **declared** the state of emergency on Tuesday, empowering the Government to take fast decisions during ten days to tackle the crisis. It is a first in the history of Luxembourg. The Prime Minister, **addressing** the Parliament, said a recession was likely, but that the economy was resilient. The Government is going to support the private sector by postponing the collection of taxes for the first two 2020 trimesters. Luxembourg finds itself in a difficult position, as the Government is trying to restrict border crossings , while the Grand Duchy health's system **relies** heavily on cross-border workers.

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MALTA

On March 15, the Prime Minister of Malta, in a **press conference** held together with Finance Minister Scicluna and Economy Minister Schembri, announced a package of tax and economic measures in order to address the impact COVID-19 might leave on the Maltese economy. More specifically, the Government of Malta has unveiled a €1.8 billion package of measures to help businesses struggling to cope with the impact of the Coronavirus. The package includes €700 million in tax deferrals, €900 million in loan guarantees, a €210 million injection to assist the economy, which includes €35 million to health authorities to fight COVID-19. The measures will apply to employers and self-employed persons. Regarding the measures to limit the COVID-19 outbreak, in addition to the closure of schools, the Maltese government announced that as of March 17 all bars (excluding take-aways), restaurants (excluding deliveries), gymnasiums, clubs, cinemas and tombola halls must remain closed.

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THE NETHERLANDS

On March 15, the Dutch government **installed measures** to combat the spread of the virus. All bars, cafés and restaurants were shut down. Schools also closed down, while they are open for the children of parents working in crucial sectors like healthcare, the police, public transport and the fire service, so that their parents can go to work. Teachers are to organise distance learning for children at home. In addition, sports clubs, gyms, saunas, sex clubs and coffee shops are closed. Everyone in the Netherlands is requested to keep at least 1.5 metres' distance from each other. These measures come in addition to the **set of rules** of March 12, which advised everyone to stay at home and work from home already. The measures are in place until April 6 inclusive.

Economic measures were taken by the Netherlands as well. The launch of the government's expanded credit guarantee scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises, the '**SME Credit Guarantee Scheme**', has been accelerated. Business owners can apply for the scheme from March 16. The government estimates that this first step will immediately make €300 million in extra financing available to SMEs affected by the current situation. In addition, companies can apply for shorter working hours through a scheme managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and can apply to the Tax and Customs Administration for a deferment of or reduction in their provisional assessment. Self-employed persons without employees (ZZPs) can apply for support under the Social Assistance (Self-employed Persons) Decree. In addition, **a package of measures** was adopted to protect people's jobs and livelihoods and to minimise the impact on self-employed people, small and medium-sized enterprises and major companies. Billions of euros will be invested into the economy every month, for as long as necessary. The measures will ensure that companies are able to pay their employees' wages, grant a bridging arrangement for self-employed people and allow companies to hang on to their money through relaxed tax provisions, allowances and supplemental lines of credit.

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POLAND

According to the latest data published on the official government information page, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has risen to 367, whereas the number of fatalities is 5. Over the weekend of March 13-15, the Government of Poland **announced** that restrictions on international border crossings will be implemented for a minimum of 10 days. All international flights and rail connections (inbound and outbound) were suspended from March 15 (with some exceptions). Polish citizens and foreigners with permission to work and reside in Poland who return from abroad are required to quarantine for 14 days after returning. The Government of Poland has announced other restrictions, including the closing of shopping centres (apart from pharmacies, grocery stores, and drugstores), suspension of restaurants and bars apart from delivery and take-out services, and limits on all gatherings of more than 50 people. These restrictions are in addition to previously announced closures of all schools, universities, and cultural institutions until March 25. On March 18, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced the creation of a so-called “anti-crisis shield” in connection with the coronavirus pandemic involving a package of actions to support companies and employees from the effects of the coronavirus epidemic.

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PORTUGAL

On 16 March, Portuguese Home Affairs Minister Eduardo Cabrita and Spanish counterpart Fernando Grande-Marlaska **presented** a bilateral agreement for border management between the two countries, in order to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, **agreed** the previous day by Prime Ministers António Costa of Portugal and Pedro Sanchez of Spain. The control of land borders between Portugal and Spain started from 23:00 on 16 March, and air, rail and river connections between the two countries will also be suspended.

On Tuesday, following the decisions taken by the EU's Heads of State or Government, the Portuguese Government **announced** the suspension of flights inside and outside the EU as of 19 March. Prime Minister Costa confirmed that there are, however, two exceptions: flights to non-EU countries where there is a strong presence of Portuguese communities (Canada, the United States, Venezuela and South Africa); and air connections with all Portuguese-speaking countries.

Portugal's government then **announced** on Wednesday a €9.2 billion-euro package to support workers and provide liquidity for companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak, worth 4.3% of the country's GDP. Finance Minister Mario Centeno said that these are measures for "times of war". The same day, Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa **decreed** the state of emergency (set at 15 days but expected to be extended) to combat the pandemic after the Portuguese Parliament had already granted its approval (adopted decree available **here**). "The country will not come to a halt" and "democracy will not be suspended", **said** Prime Minister António Costa Wednesday evening after the Council of Ministers also endorsed the Presidential decree which allows for the restriction of movement of people, the temporary suspension of the right of workers to strike in some sectors, as well as to ban protests and social or religious meetings. Personal rights or "freedoms of expression and information" however must not be affected. **The first set of measures**, adopted the following day, imposes limitations on travel and economic initiative.

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ROMANIA

The Romanian National Committee for Special Emergency Situations **adopted** extraordinary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Government **published** a list of fifteen guidelines calling for responsible social behavior in preventing the spread of COVID-19. President Klaus Iohannis **announced** a state of emergency in Romania, starting March 16, and issued a decree establishing the state of emergency for a period of 30 days. Indoor events with more than 100 participants are suspended and schools are closed until March 22. Several border crossings were **closed** to restrict traffic.

On March 17, Romania's National Committee for Special Emergency Situations adopted new restrictions. These include the suspension of serving of food and beverages in restaurants, hotels, bars, coffee shops, and other hospitality units. Flights to and from Spain were also suspended for 14 days starting March 18. The suspension of flights to and from Italy was prolonged by 14 days starting March 23.

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SLOVAKIA

Slovakia **declared** an exceptional state as of March 12 after the government's crisis meeting. Moreover, the Slovak government announced a travel ban on entering Slovakia, shut down all international airports and reintroduced border controls (with the exception of Polish border). No traveler without a permanent residence or employment in Slovakia is admitted. People returning from abroad must enter into 14-days quarantine. Schools, most shops and events are closed, with the exception of supermarkets, pharmacies and other essential infrastructure.

On March 16, the government declared an emergency state for all public hospitals to speed up logistics for necessary equipment. Moreover, Slovakia announced a postponement of tax declarations to reduce the economic impact of COVID-19 restrictions. Further measures are still expected to be announced. The Ministry of Health recommended that citizens reduce their movements and wear protective face masks. Slovakia held a parliamentary election on February 29 2020. The current COVID-19 measures have been taken by the outgoing Smer-SD government. The new government of Igor Matovič is **expected** to be sworn in on Saturday March 21. The incoming Minister of Health, Marek Krajčí, is a cardiologist and is currently serving as an MP.

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SLOVENIA

A national **emergency response plan** was activated on March 12th, as the Minister of Health, Aleš Šabeder, issued an order declaring an epidemic in accordance with Article 7 of the Contagious Diseases Act. All restaurants and bars have been closed and the land border with Italy closed. To alleviate the situation in the economy and protect the situation of employees, the Government **adopted** the proposal for the Act on the Intervention Measure of Deferred Payment of Borrowers' Liabilities, which allows deferring the payment of loan agreement liabilities for 12 months. Prime Minister Janez Janša **explained** that "the economy is important, but this is a moment when people's safety and health come first".

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SPAIN

On Saturday March 14, the Spanish Government approved the **state of alarm** throughout the country for a period of 15 days to tackle the health emergency caused by coronavirus COVID-19 in Spain. The decree guarantees the supply of food and promotes measures for social distance, while allowing movement for basic needs. People may only drive alone and activities are limited to basic needs, such as buying food or medication, attending health centres and financial institutions, returning to one's primary residence and caring for vulnerable people. Another exception is to travel to work.

On Monday March 16, the Government **announced** the re-establishment of land border controls within the framework of the measures to contain COVID-19. This measure will not apply to the transport of goods “in order to ensure the continuity of economic activity and to maintain the supply chain”. On Tuesday afternoon Spain's government **announced** a relief package to inject €200 billion into the economy, with €117 billion coming from the public purse and the remainder private money. The measures include delaying mortgage payments, easing social security contributions and allowing employees who need to care for dependent relatives to reduce their workday by as much as 100%. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez described this package as the biggest allocation of resources in Spanish history. Wednesday morning, Sánchez **addressed** Congress to explain the various measures put forward in response to the crisis. In the evening, King Felipe VI held a public address where he called on Spaniards to remain united and calm “We are going to defeat this crisis”.

On Thursday, Spain's Minister for Health, Salvador Illa, **reported** that more than 50,000 professionals are being added to healthcare teams of the various health authorities around the country. The same day, passenger transportation restrictions on air and sea routes between Mainland Spain and the **Canary** and **Balearic** Islands, as well as between the islands themselves were imposed. Also, State Secretariat for Trade State Secretary for Trade, Xiana Méndez, **issued** a 'Guide of Good Practices' for establishments and sector workers to protect from COVID-19. Finally, Prime Minister Sánchez **chaired** the meeting of the Coronavirus Technical Management Committee, attended by the Ministers for Defence; for Home Affairs; for Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, and for Health. Pedro Sánchez announced that he will meet again with the regional presidents on Sunday by video-conference to strengthen coordination and collaboration to tackle COVID-19.

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SWEDEN

With a view to helping mitigate the financial impact of the virus outbreak, the Government of Sweden **presented** on Monday 16th, a crisis package proposal (for approval at the Riksdag) which can potentially encompass more than SEK 300 billion if the entire liquidity reinforcement through tax accounts is used. It foresees short-term layoffs and the central government is to assume sick pay responsibility for two months. The Government presented a bill on the additional amending budget to the on 19 March.

On 17 March, in response to the European Council's and the European Commission's call for travel restrictions, the Government **decided** to temporarily stop (as of 19 March and initially apply for 30 days) non-essential travel to Sweden so as to mitigate the effects of the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and reduce the spread of the disease. The following day, in light of the impact of SARS-CoV-2 in the transport industry, in particular the aviation industry, the Government **announced** plans enabling airlines that on 1 January 2020 were in possession of a Swedish permit to operate to receive credit guarantees in 2020 amounting to a maximum of SEK 5 billion. These credit guarantees must be reported to and approved by the European Commission before they can be provided.

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