

Annex

VIDEOCONFERENCE R&I DGs ON R&I ACTION ON COVID-19

MEMBER STATES CONTRIBUTIONS

15 April 2020

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CZECHIA

Possible new ERAvsCorona actions

Below, Czechia provides comments on selected actions, which are proposed as suggestions for possible additional set of (new) actions going beyond the current short-list of 10 actions – included in the Action Plan “ERAvsCorona” and endorsed by the European Commission and by EU Member States’ Research Ministers on the occasion of videoconference held on 7th April 2020.

- ***To shift part of the proposed budget to finance projects from the reserve list drawn in the first COVID-19 call as such projects could be implementable quickly without additional time required for project proposals submission and evaluation:***
 - Czechia would prefer launching a new call “Expression of Interest” within the framework of Horizon 2020, focused on innovative and rapid health-related approaches to respond to the SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19, and to deliver quick results relevant to society and a higher level of preparedness of health systems, as indicated by the Action Plan “ERAvsCorona” in the Action No 3.
 - Since the SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 massive outbreak in Europe, new ideas to tackle a broad range of health-related and socioeconomic challenges have emerged in the EU, while the project proposals prepared and submitted before were based on challenges of that time. A brand new call would, therefore, provide all interested stakeholders a fresh opportunity to address most up-to-date and relevant topics, which have newly appeared since then.
- ***To prepare a fast track mission on COVID-19***
 - First of all, Czechia would like to assess the current portfolio of funding instruments, which could be mobilised for fighting the SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19, in the first place. These are calls launched under the Horizon 2020 “Health” configuration; specific initiatives/programmes, such as the IMI and/or EDCTP; not to mention the tools established outside the scope of Horizon 2020 implementation, such as the CEPI alliance, etc. Still very recently, suggestion for a new co-programmed partnership was put on the table too.
 - If the fast track mission on SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 is suggested as a new funding incentive – complementing the already existing European landscape of R&D funding instruments – a cost benefit analysis should frame such incentive, identifying the eventual gaps (if any), which need to be filled by such an approach.
- ***To set up COVID-19 R&I catalogue of running (national and EU) COVID-19-relevant R&I projects and programmes and offering a (national or EU) top-up for integrating new partners that bring added value to the project and linking COST actions to these projects***

- Czechia has already implemented the scheme for top-up funding, which is provided to the projects that might be relevant for fighting SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 and mitigating impacts thereof. The measure aims to top-up finance the proof-of-concept projects, but does not limit itself to the proof-of-concept projects exclusively.
- If EU top-up funding would be provided, on what legal basis and for what kinds of projects? Which authorities would select such projects for EU top-up funding?
- ***Coordination of national policies to promote open sciences by introducing a request for the complete opening of publications as well as data from research on the COVID-19 epidemic in Member States.***
 - While open access to scientific publications has been already implemented throughout the EU, open access to research data remains a challenge for the years to come, to be driven by the European Open Science Cloud initiative. A number of research institutes have been operating in accordance with the open/FAIR data principles already. In particular, it applies to large-scale European research infrastructures (ERIC, ESFRI) and their national nodes.
 - Nevertheless, for a number of research institutes a direct implementation of a request for the complete and immediate opening of the data from research conducted on the SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 epidemic may be a challenge – not due to the unwillingness to do so, but because these institutions still may not dispose of relevantly robust data infrastructure.
 - In Czechia, massive investments in further development of data infrastructure of research institutes in line with the open/FAIR data approach are planned for the post-2020 cohesion policy period of the EU. Without granting extra financial resources instant implementation of the open/FAIR data approach in the way of strict obligation may cause obstacles on side of various research institutes to conduct SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 related R&D regardless of their eagerness to comply with such a condition.

Vaccines, treatment and diagnostics: development and manufacturing

- ***Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference? How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?***
 - The virtual pledge event, which has been envisioned by the EU top stakeholders, is a topic of highest political relevance. Numerous organisational units of the European Commission – DG International Cooperation, DG Research and Innovation, DG Health and Food Safety, DG Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European External Action Service – are said to be engaged with the preparatory works.

- Due to the magnitude of the topic and lack of time to prepare a consolidated national high-level position, Czechia currently cannot make any official commitment / communicate any official standpoint. In Czechia, such an agenda needs to be addressed by the cross-sectorial EU affairs coordination and decision-making platform, which is organised by the Office of the Government. To facilitate such a decision-making process more information is urgently needed. In this regard, it is absolutely necessary to learn as soon as possible:
 - (1) What are the operative details of the action titled “virtual pledge event”?
 - (2) Which Member States’ stakeholders have been approached in parallel by other European Commission’s DGs with the same proposal?
 - (3) What is the timeline for communicating the final Member States’ positions?

FINLAND

Action plan

In general, Finland welcomes the current Commission Action Plan. The main target should be a rapid implementation. Commission should put quickly forward concrete proposals to the relevant groups, such as Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 Strategic Committees, and Health Committee.

Action 4 and 5

Finland supports Commissions efforts to facilitate contacts with investors and potential buyers to the companies having applied EIC funding.

When organising e-pitching events for investors, Commission should pay attention that these events will not result move towards higher degree of non-European ownership of the companies.

Action 6

Commission intention to create a one-stop shop for Corona R&I funding programmes is good initiative. In addition, it would be useful if Commission could share the list of relevant currently running projects.

Here the list of R&I calls in Finland, which are open or under preparation:

1. Corona co-creation is a collaborative project with the objective to develop solutions to Covid-19 or the disruptions caused by it. Funding can be applied for until June 30th, 2020. <https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/coronacocreation>
2. Funding for business development in disruptive circumstances is for individual SMEs and mid-cap companies whose business has been negatively affected by Covid-19. The total budget dedicated for this activity is € 800 millions, divided into grants of 10k€ (feasibility study phase) or 100k€ (implementation / development phase). https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/for-finnish-customers/services/funding/disruptive_situations_funding/
3. Academy of Finland's special call for applications for research into COVID-19. The funding available through the call is 8.45 M€. The call is open between 7-28 April, 2020. Funding decisions will be taken in May. The aims of the funding to be granted for research into the COVID-19 epidemic are: to support research in the field and/or to improve open access to research data and outputs for researchers and society and/or to promote the use of research knowledge in mitigating the effects and/or to promote the utilisation of research-based knowledge and expertise. <https://www.aka.fi/en/about-us/media/press-releases/2020/academy-of-finland-opens-special-call-for-applications-for-research-into-covid-19/>

4. Academy of Finland-funded researchers may also, without additional funding, direct their ongoing project towards studying the COVID-19 epidemic and its mitigation by applying for a change in the intended use of funding. <https://www.aka.fi/en/about-us/media/whats-new/2020/information-for-funding-recipients-and-applicants-on-the-effects-of-the-coronavirus-epidemic/>
5. The Strategic Research Council's program call is in the preparation phase.
6. Nordic cooperation NordForsk COVID-19 call is under preparation. The Research Council for Biosciences, Health and the Environment of the Academy of Finland supports the initiative. The other Nordic research funders are yet to take decisions on joining the call.
7. NordForsk Pandemic Preparedness program will open a new call directed towards COVID-19 research. The Research Council for Culture and Society of the Academy of Finland is currently considering whether to join the initiative.

Action 10

The first Hack the crisis Finland was organised 22-23 March. Over 200 teams with over 1500 persons participated in this event. Jury selected 5 winning teams proposing solutions from AI based system to offer up-dated info for authorities on the Corona epidemic in Finland, to distance learning/teaching connecting pupils, teachers and parents.

Vaccines, treatment and diagnostics: development and manufacturing

Question for discussion:

Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference?

- Finland appreciates The Commission's efforts to further strengthen and facilitate cooperation at European level. Complementarity of our R&I actions are critical at this time. All measures should be targeted to the resilience of the health care systems and the wellbeing of our citizens and functionality of the economies.
- As raised in the proposal for the Pledging event, it is important starting point to emphasize that all new vaccines, diagnostics and treatments developed for COVID-19 must be globally available, appropriate, and affordable, regardless of where they have been developed, or who has funded them.
- Covid-19 vaccines are a common good for health and critical to stopping the epidemic. The Finnish government has directed Funding for the research and development of a COVID-19 vaccine through CEPI (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation) andIVI (International Vaccine Institute).
- We must all join in the efforts of financing the WHO Preparedness and response plan and the UN humanitarian appeal for Covid-19.

How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?

Here the current contributions in the framework of UN:

In response to the UN global humanitarian response plan for COVID-19 and the Red Cross and Red Crescent appeal, Finland will provide 2,2 MEUR for UNHCR's COVID-19 preparedness and response plan for Sub-Saharan Africa. And 1 MEUR for the Finnish Red Cross (FRC) in support of the IFRC's COVID-19-operation mainly in Lebanon.

Finland will contribute one million euros in the form of multilateral development support to the World Health Organization (WHO) for its work in developing countries to prepare and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. With this support WHO will provide expert and material assistance especially to countries with a limited health emergency preparedness capacity.

Concerning humanitarian assistance about 45 % of Finnish funding is allocated in the form of flexible, multiannual core funding to key UN humanitarian organizations, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the International Red Cross movement. This enables partner organizations to respond to any crisis, including COVID-19 without any delay.

Finland also provides non-earmarked flexible core funding to UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF, total of 60 MEUR. Non-earmarked funding allows the organization to reallocate in a swift and flexible manner funding to unexpected and acute crises such as COVID-19.

HUNGARY

ERAVSCORONA ACTION PLAN

In general we welcome all actions included in the Action Plan and appreciate receiving more detailed information about the implementation of the planned activities. Substantial part of the action plan targets the actors of the innovation ecosystem (innovative SMEs and start-ups), however, the links and coordination between these actions could be further improved in order to maximise synergies.

We do agree and stress the importance of the **coordination of R&I funding against the Coronavirus** covering the whole pipeline, however, the proposal for a new co-programmed partnership is missing from the current action plan, only the setting up of the ad-hoc working group is initiated. We would like to ask for clarification if the idea of co-programming for COVID-19 is completely abandoned or the ad-hoc working group is expected to discuss the feasibility of a dedicated partnership. Also more information on the potential mandate of the ad-hoc working group would be welcome.

We would like to encourage the Commission to further analyse and explore whether the proposed possible new ERAvsCorona actions can be implemented in the short term in particular those focusing

- on the reorientation/refocusing on existing and upcoming Horizon 2020 projects calls towards activities aimed at rapidly tackling COVID-19, with a possibility to offer (top-up) funding
- and setting up COVID-19 R&I catalogue of running (national and EU) COVID-19-relevant R&I projects and programmes and offering a (national or EU) top-up for integrating new partners that bring added value to the project.

VACCINES, TREATMENT AND DIAGNOSTICS: DEVELOPMENT AND MANUFACTURING

- *Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference?*
- *How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?*

The new type of threat, the COVID-19 virus has made governments all around the world rethink the ordinary way of living and making an economy functional.

To prepare for the heavy virus spread across citizens, to reinforce the healthcare systems and trying to find an adequate answer within the RDI domain (vaccine, treatments etc.) as well as to initiate protective measures in the economy have already consumed and will consume enormous amounts of money coming from the state budget.

In our view the establishment of an ad-hoc expert group to cover the entire pipeline of vaccines, treatment and diagnostics is an important milestone to start discussions at operational level how the ongoing national COVID-19 related RDI activities can be most efficiently coordinated in the EU and how a coherent, and transparent approach can be

developed

together.

We do appreciate the pledging event initiative of the European Commission, but before starting a discussion about it, and about the possible national contributions, we need to clarify the following questions in order to underpin responsible decisions:

- what is the main goal of this event? To support the RDI community to accelerate the pace of their COVID-19 related RDI actions or to assist the most vulnerable countries in their fight against the pandemic? If both are goals of the event, a well-defined proportionality needs to be set. It would also be worth clarifying what part of the received funding would be transferred to CEPI and other global programmes and what part would be allocated to European initiatives;
- the corona virus is a challenge worldwide. In the list of key international partners (with EU Science and Technology Agreements), the United States, Russia, China are missing. We need to have shared common efforts to tackle the virus;
- on the basis of the working paper it is not entirely clear how the European Commission through the H2020 programme will contribute to the joint efforts to be generated by the pledging event: direct financial contribution is expected or rather existing projects, research data platforms supported by the H2020 programme will become part of the initiative;
- since significant budgetary resources are demanded in all Member States to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we would propose to open up the pledging event also for in-kind contributions through relevant national RDI actions and initiatives;
- even before the launch of the event a decision is needed which organisations will benefit from the envisaged budget and about the main focus (RDI or humanitarian aid etc.);
- the event should be as open as possible and engage a wide audience. It could bring together committed citizens, organizations, companies from all over the world – actually anybody, who would like to contribute to the fight against the virus and the crisis. With adequate digital infrastructure background a dedicated website with a “donation counter” can make this effort even more visible. The same website should also provide information on the individual projects which will benefit from the “common pot”. Wide dissemination of both the event and its results could be one of the in-kind contributions of national governments.

ITALY

As our Minister stated at the virtual Ministerial Meeting held on April 7, **we support the Action Plan proposed by the Commission and its 10 Actions**, but we would like to see the attention not being circumscribed to the bio-medical domain, but **expanded to the whole array of sciences**.

Probably, a more intense use of **big data, high-performance computing and artificial intelligence** could have supported earlier warning and earlier and more effective measures to counteract the epidemic. We should not overlook this lesson for a future that is already around the corner.

On the basis of the documents provided in preparation of the 15th April virtual meeting of Research DGs', we focus here **on the implementation** of the proposed Actions, providing our comments on how we envisage that some Actions should be implemented.

ACTION 1

About **Action 1**, we note that the initial idea of a **Co-programmed Partnership** on COVID-19 & SARS-CoV-2 disappeared from the horizon. We supported this idea, and we still think that it would be an appropriate initiative.

We agree on the need for establishing an **ad hoc Working Group to coordinate R&I funding against the Coronavirus**, to support **immediate actions** for tackling the current Covid-19 pandemics, covering the whole pipeline, from pre-clinical research to products available to citizens, first of all, in the shortest term, diagnostics and treatments, and then, possibly, vaccines, although we should be aware that no vaccine against any Coronavirus, including SARS, has been developed yet.

We already communicated two names of experts who have responsibilities for funding health-related R&I and for implementing public health measures.

However, we still think that, among its terms of reference, the *ad hoc* Group should also consider **the establishment of a Co-programmed Partnership on Coronavirus**.

The fight against the virus and its ravages will unfortunately last quite long, therefore, to optimise the effectiveness and impact of public funding, we believe that the **Fight against Coronavirus** should find its place alongside the 44 subjects that we already identified as being worth a **common European effort as a R&I co-programmed Partnership**.

ACTION 2

On the wake of our long-standing experience in the participation to international trials on several disease areas, including infectious diseases (e.g. HIV/AIDS), we express our full support to **the extension of and support to large EU wide clinical trials**. The Italian Drugs Agency (AIFA) is acting rapidly in this sense, having already **approved 9 multi-centre trials**. This was made possible thanks to the speeding up of the regulatory aspects, including the establishment of a centralized Ethical Committee dedicated to the review of COVID-19 studies.

We would also support the inclusion in the next Framework Programme of specific calls (RIA) with special requirements in terms of minimum numbers of participating Member States.

As already stated under Action 1, we would favour the launch of a Co-programmed Partnership on COVID-19, covering as well clinical research. Such a new partnership should issue specific calls, in close relationship with the Health Innovation Partnership.

ACTION 4

The significant investments required to all European countries to deal with the Covid-19 emergency must surely be geared towards supporting health systems in the 'acute' phase, which is likely to last for weeks/months - at least in some countries -, but cannot ignore **the subsequent most likely 'sub-chronic' phase**, during which we should help economy to recover, still guaranteeing safe conditions for all.

In this perspective, it is important to support innovation in areas that have been considered 'collateral', but are demonstrably fundamental for their direct impact on the healthcare sector and, more generally, for their capacity to assist re-activating the production in safe conditions in all industry and service sectors.

The most striking example is **robotics**. Research on and production of robots able to perform risky tasks, preserving human operators should be encouraged and incentivised.

Robots can be a safe and effective interface between care givers and infected persons. Europe could deploy a large, integrated effort to design and produce robots to contrast the current pandemic, and the ones that inevitably will occur in the future.

Since the TRL of many robotics systems is close to 8-9, already in the short term many operational tasks, such as cleaning, disinfecting, logistics, could be entrusted to robots.

In the medium term, our researchers could focus on developing a new generation of high performance and reliable "Robot Companions", ready to accomplish even more sophisticated bedside tasks (as swabbing, intubating, cannulating).

ACTION 5

We agree with the emphasis placed on a dedicated **Covid Seal of Excellence** with an involvement of private investors.

The temporary framework for State aid measures and, in particular, the explicit reference to the COVID Seal of Excellence projects, are valuable measures.

However, we cannot yet be sure of the real possibility for public funding bodies to finance all projects with grants, with the same aid intensity as in Horizon 2020.

Therefore, we believe that it is worth considering the possibility to complement the public financial intervention with private capital.

Action by Seal's practical community is important in order to maximize the involvement of public funding bodies, but, at the same time, it is essential to rapidly mobilize private equity investments to support high potential (small) businesses.

ACTION 6

For **Action 6**, i.e. **Establishing a one stop shop for Coronavirus R&I funding**, we agree on the need for a catalogue of national funding opportunities, structured according to a standard template.

However, we see this single entry point also as an opportunity for **widening the projects' teams** by integrating new partners that bring added value to the projects and **offering joint national and EU top-up funding** in order to improve scope and impact of the projects.

ACTION 7

Having defined the ‘terms of reference’ of the *ad hoc* WG in charge of Action 1, it becomes easier **to identify the added value and to define the scope and mandate of the High Level R&I Task Force on the Coronavirus**, which is the subject of **Action 7**.

In our view, this Task Force should be in charge of **monitoring the implementation of all the Actions** included in the Plan and, since the Plan has been defined as a ‘living document’, also of **identifying and proposing further Actions in the future**.

The Task Force could bridge and co-ordinate the scientific and public health domain with the wider societal domain, which is not within the scope of Action 1.

Our experience in the last, recent weeks clearly shows that the role of **citizens’ empowerment and engagement** is at least as decisive as the ‘technical’ tools to counteract the spread of the epidemic.

The Task Force would ensure an **effective co-ordination of the scientific efforts** within the EU and also in the interactions with non-EU countries, making the EU speaking with one voice. The TF could guarantee to have one strategy for COVID-19, with standardized policies across countries, also during the crucial post-quarantine phase.

Furthermore, a well-co-ordinated EU action would be crucial **to support developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa**, where the pandemic might be deadly severe

To make the current blooming of initiatives of various nature, including the proposed **International Pledging Initiative**, really beneficial for achieving our common goal, an effective coordination of these initiatives is strongly needed. As stated in the relevant document “we need to know who does what and make sure the work is done in a complementary manner”. **This is exactly what the Task Force is for!**

The working document on possible new **ERAvsCorona actions** states that **Horizon Europe missions represent longer-term objectives**, whereas we are currently trying to mobilise instruments that can be used in the short-term to tackle the corona-virus challenge.

This is correct, however, in order **to avoid being confronted again with the overwhelming lack of preparedness** that we experienced this time, we should start immediately working on a slightly longer-term and ambitious objective whose motto could be **“Zero deaths for infectious diseases by the year 2025”**.

Thus, an additional item of the task force mandate could be to act as the **‘Mission Board’** of this new European Mission.

The trans-disciplinary composition of the Task Force will assure to **tap the full potential of big data, high-performance computing and artificial intelligence**, that has not been the case thus far.

In fact, we are now prioritising products for **‘the day after’**, such as diagnostic tests and treatments, which is legitimate because we are in the days after, but we should, for the future, think about **‘the day before’**, i.e. to **forecasting epidemics, early detecting outbreaks of new epidemics, or relapses of the past one**.

This is why we estimate that **the Task Force/Mission Board should be immediately set up**.

ACTION 8

For what concerns **Access to Research Infrastructures**, most Italy-based RIs have been addressed to contribute to COVID-19 research. The responses have been collected by the ESFRI Italian delegation and ICDI (Italian Computing and Data Infrastructure).

In this Action, as almost everywhere in the Action Plan, much emphasis is placed on bio-medical research, but we believe that **other domains (Physics & Engineering and Social Sciences & Humanities) require equal attention**, as COVID-19 has a systemic impact on society and economy.

One issue that should be addressed is to create the **adequate conditions for RIs to operate at a time of mobility restrictions**. Indeed, the paradigm for the exploitation of RIs is the user access to exploit the RI resources: this can be hindered for some unpredictable time.

It is therefore urgent to implement a new paradigm, **enabling scientists to carry out their research projects without traveling to the RIs**. This requires a fast development of effective modalities for 'external' scientists to interact with local operators at the RIs.

High priority should be given to cover the costs related to allow 'virtual' access to the users of the RIs facilities. This could be implemented through the TNA instrument (including virtual access) and be reserved to RIs launching specific COVID-19 activities. Data resulting from such activities should also serve as a basis for EOSC metadata and should be compliant with FAIR data principles.

Technologies for direct interaction and **remote control of instruments** are only limitedly available and should be urgently developed. Most likely part of resources should be transferred from physical mobility (travel and subsistence expenses) to **extra personnel costs (at the RIs) and technology development** for real-time remote control of instruments and data analysis. In the long run, this should become 'the rule', which may produce positive impacts also in terms of CO2 footprint.

*****ACTION 9*****

On Action 9, **COVID-19 Research Data Platform**, we believe that care should be taken to avoid both fragmentation and duplication (worse, multiplication) of efforts. However we should consider that data banks exist and the communication of scientific results has quite efficient and well-established channels.

The EOSC is designed **to store and make available FAIR data**. At present, not much of the available data are FAIR (it takes time!) and to start EOSC with data of uncontrolled quality would be a bad start.

In our view, it would be wiser, at present, **to start with an EOSC of metadata**: an open catalogue of descriptors of all the datasets that exist and are being produced on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19, leaving to the peer-to-peer level the decision to trust and use these datasets. By lowering down the quality threshold of datasets, the whole concept and the high potential of EOSC could be undermined.

In fact, **a metadata format to be adopted by all actors involved in SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 research** could be quickly designed, leaving to the 'producers' the responsibility of data quality checking and archiving.

LITHUANIA

1. ERAvsCORONA ACTION PLAN – Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference?

Lithuania acknowledges the importance of the coordinated EU response to COVID-19 and supports the action plan proposed by the European Commission. Specifically, we welcome:

- the initiative to set up EU wide clinical trials and to provide additional funding for that;
- organisation of e-Pitching and its active promotion among former EIC applicants. Furthermore, we think, that EIC Community Platform would benefit from the involvement of NCPs;
- promotion of Seal of Excellence. Up to now Lithuania has already funded 14 SME-1 projects, awarded with Seal of Excellence;
- measures to ensure open access to infrastructure, results and data (especially, seroepidemiological data and genomic data on the virus' mutations).

I would like to point out, that on the national level Lithuania has decided to launch two calls for proposals to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The first call is dedicated to innovators, technology developers, startups and innovative companies that can offer research and innovation based unconventional solutions to manage the COVID-19 crisis. The second call targets universities and research institutions, that are able to contribute to the COVID-19 challenge.

Finally, we would like to propose foreseeing an extra EIC Accelerator call cut-off date, dedicated to COVID-19, in mid-June. This call could focus on the development of technologies and devices to provide protection to health personnel (robotics, mechatronics, etc), as well as methods (including AI) for monitoring the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic.

2. VACCINES, TREATMENT AND DIAGNOSTICS: DEVELOPMENT AND MANUFACTURING – How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?

Lithuania acknowledges the efforts of the EC and other EU institutions to contribute to the development of the vaccine, treatment and diagnostics. Lithuania would like to contribute to this process and would appreciate any further information about the possibilities to join undergoing projects on clinical trials.

SLOVENIA

Question for discussion:

- Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference?
- How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?

We fully agree that the EU should consolidate its approach to vaccines, treatments, diagnostics etc. and see the action plan as an adequate ground for this, including for the purpose of speaking with one voice at the pledging conference. At the moment we still require further information on implementation of some actions in practice, but we believe that it could be an important instrument of common approach against COVID-19 in the EU.

Concretely, we would like to suggest a few new elements to the Action plan:

1. The exit strategy is certainly crucial challenge of the post COVID-19 period. In order to have a Union-level approach, **we will need comparable and reliable Union-level information**. An unknown share of population is either (still) carrying the virus or have developed antibodies without even knowing that they were infected. It is probable that sizes of both groups will also significantly differ from country to country. We need to agree therefore very quickly on how **we should sample and probe the population**, to obtain first an objective snapshot and then the trends for the shares of infected vs. immune parts of the population. It is crucial that we define the methodology and the approach together, **or we could end up with incompatible datasets which will prevent comparisons and EU-level analysis**, effectively again limiting the possibility of acting on the EU-level, instead of on national level only.
2. We still suggest that the Commission would **allow existing or upcoming projects to refocus onto COVID-19** and minimize the administrative burden if this is suggested by the project consortium. Solutions could be developed much faster this way than through new projects that haven't even started yet.
3. A possibility of a **"hop-on" to running projects** would be extremely beneficial for all sides and **is strongly encouraged by Slovenia**, as currently unutilised competences across EU could be brought together to fight COVID-19. This option could be implemented either with support of national/structural funds, or EU funds or both and should only require an amendment to the grant agreement. Bureaucratic obstacles should be overcome when the situation requires.
4. We give preference to financial instruments instead of PCP-PPI actions.

Our further comments and requests for information on the 10 proposed actions:

Action 1 (**coordination of R&I funding**): We support establishment of ad-hoc working group, which will be a body for coordination of activities and policies and could clarify also the implementation of other actions that will be implemented on the EU and national level simultaneously. As one instrument of coordinated R&I funding we stress the lead agency principle, which is well functioning for bottom-up cooperation between member states. We have just joined a Lead-agency call of AT (lead), CZ, LU, DE, PL, SI and CH. We still encourage a wider use of the Lead-agency principle, also through the ERAvsCORONA.

Action 2 (EU wide clinical trials): We believe that the EU wide clinical trials are necessary to have a full picture about efficiency of COVID-19 treatment protocols. However, the DisCoVery and REMAP-CAP trials are at the moment relatively limited in the number of participating institutions /countries. It is important to define how new institutions can join the supported large-scale, multi-centric clinical trials i.e. REMAP-CAP and DISCOVERY to participate with their expertise and data with more diverse demography. The pan-European coverage is by our opinion of crucial importance to cover all different situations around the EU and justify the European added value.

Action 3 (new H2020 call): We believe that the thematic programming should be done at the Health PC and not through the Action plan, at the same time it is necessary to ensure inclusiveness of instruments. Also relaxing of ESIF and State aid rules is welcomed and will solve many obstacles we are facing with the design of structural funds instruments.

Action 4 and 5 (support to innovative companies and COVID SoE): We hope to see more potentials across the EU supported through the EIC call results than was the case through sc1-phe-coronavirus-2020. We also support the COVID-19 Seal of Excellence, in particularly together with the revised State Aid framework. The matchmakings and the e-pitches are also supported.

Action 7 (ad-hoc Task Force): The task force should deliver in a short timeframe (max. 3 months) clearly defined objectives and propose a process for addressing them on national and EU level. At the moment the objective, deliverables and mandate of the group are not clear and therefore the desirable profile of members is hard to define.

Action 8 (RIs):

- Reasons for topping-up 3 running grants are not given and are hard to understand, as all other projects seem not to require the top-up. Would it be allocated through a competitive call?
- The list of infrastructures launching COVID-19 activities is very different from the same list published by ERF (<https://erf-aisbl.eu/research-infrastructures-offer-for-research-on-covid-19/>) or ESFRI (<https://www.esfri.eu/covid-19>). What are the reasons for different lists?

We believe that common approach to all infrastructures shall be used.

Action 10 (hackathon):

We strongly support a hackathon as an instrument of broad mobilisation of different publics, which will probably bring many interesting and out-of-the-box solutions. In our opinion the preparation activities are a showcase of good collaboration between MS and EC which produce joint ownership of the process and will encourage member states to use results also in post COVID-19 period.

SPAIN

Recognize the efforts of Jean Eric Paquet and his team to react to the discussion that took place during the informal Ministerial meeting last week.

1. Implementation of the first 10 priority actions

- Further clarification concerning the establishment of an **ad-hoc working group** as part of action 1, to **improve the coordination of R&I funding against COVID 19**.
 - **Support this ad hoc working group with a clear objective:** coordinate funding actions undertaken by Member States and by the Commission, including both ex post coordination of on-going initiatives and to provide as fast as possible a feasible set of solutions to better coordinate (funding sources and administrative feasible options) further joint R&I actions, transnational calls, joint calls, top up, etc. on vaccine's development, treatments and diagnostics for COVID-19.
 - The main role of this ad hoc working group **should not be to provide scientific advice** or to present an effective strategy on the development of vaccine(s), treatments and diagnostics for Covid-19.
 - The **group should focus on an effective strategy for funding and implementing joint R&I actions, to identify possible overlapping or synergies between projects and programs, to improve consistency and to streamline procedures** by introducing a proportionate approach that facilitates co-operation.

- For action 7, **establishment of an ad-hoc High Level R&I Task Force on the Coronavirus**.
 - In favor of **proceeding immediately to the establishment** of this **High Level R&I Task Force**.
 - However further information from DG R&I is needed, including clarification on the role and interactions of the **High Level R&I Task Force with other expert and advisory configurations¹**,

2. Vaccines, treatment and diagnostics: development and manufacturing

- First, we recognize the high value of the proposed 10 actions, in particular **we encourage Action 2 the extension of and support to large EU wide clinical trials. This action has a great strategic value**, but for it we need first to map the variety of on-going initiatives.
 - Emphasize the role of Italian and Spanish hospitals to conduct **large** and **open** clinical trials. Large number of COVID-19 patients in Italy and Spain provide solid scientific evidence on different treatments that may benefit initiatives in other countries.

¹ One additional question for DG R&I refers to the role of **R&I** in a coordinated action for vaccine's development and other relevant treatments being discussed at the level of the IPCR

- It is **important to speed up this process**, as well as to **clarify the ad hoc group that will discuss further steps on clinical trials**. Do you refer to the **ad-hoc High Level R&I Task Force on the Coronavirus**?
- From where will be coming the additional funding for the large trials?
- **Vaccines and treatments are essential from our perspective**, and we all agree that they should be address in strong cooperation at European level and internationally.
- **To draw an effective roadmap requires expertise but first we need clarification on the “ad-hoc group** (including relevant R&I, health and regulatory representatives of MS, European Medicines Agency, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, European Investment Bank, representative from EC COVID-19 Advisory Group...) to cover the entire pipeline of vaccines, treatment and diagnostics” (mentioned in page 11 of the document on vaccines included in the annotated agenda for today). This is related to the answer we may provide to the proposed questions for discussion.

Questions for discussion

Do you agree with a consolidated EU approach as stepping stone for the EU pledging conference?

How do you see your national contribution to this pledging event?

- We welcome EU efforts and views expressed in the joint Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19. In particular, we fully share the need to “accelerate research efforts to develop effective treatments, vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics, and ensure universal availability at an affordable price”. It is clearly within the basic principles of the EU, but also in the best of the EU interest to tackle the pandemics worldwide.
- Is very difficult at this stage to anticipate what can be done from R&I without taking into account, escalation, regulation and production. From our perspective, is very important, first to understand **what are the main barriers to overcome** to define a coordinated EU strategy.
- Ask DG R&I to elaborate a **first draft on divergent perspectives identified across Member States**, or at least send a limited number of key issues to identify divergent and convergent points of view.
- Further **exploitation of R&I results and the distribution of IPRs is from our perspective a key issue**.

Who does what is still a fundamental question and we do not have a clear map yet [not about the division of tasks and responsibilities, not about the distribution of funding (both funders and recipients)].

At national level we have also to set up an effective coordination mechanism in order to reach a common and shared view among different Ministerial departments. So, at this

moment is not possible to be specific about our national contribution, both in financial and in kind.

Last but not least, a major effort may be done at the level of MS to mobilize potential donors from private institutions together with national resources.