

Meeting of the European Affairs Ministers of the Southern European Union countries (MED7) countries

(June 4, 2020)

Joint statement

European coordination and solidarity are our best assets to overcome the unprecedented crisis we are facing. We, the Ministers in charge of European Affairs of Greece, Cyprus, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, met by videoconference on 4 June to join our efforts in order to ensure Europe can weather this crisis together and come out of it united and stronger.

a) Coming out of this crisis together requires an ambitious European recovery plan, based on real solidarity. We welcome the Commission's proposal and we call on all EU partners to work towards a quick and ambitious agreement on this basis. In these discussions, we will jointly defend a volume of grants commensurate with the severe social and economic shock and with the need to avoid distortions in the single market. We recall the Franco-German initiative which supports a volume of 500 billion euros in grants. The recovery plan must provide support as soon as possible to the sectors, regions and Member States most affected by the crisis, which should be reflected in the allocation key. It should be financed through borrowing on behalf of the EU and repaid over the long-term through the EU budget, including possibly through a comprehensive reform of the revenue side. The recovery should be consistent with our European priorities such as the European Green Deal, the digital transformation and the social agenda. The next MFF must also reflect this ambition and solidarity, in order to both contribute to the recovery and preserve our long-standing priorities.

b) In the current phase, we believe that the coordination of national exit strategies is key to succeed in our fight against the pandemic while restarting our economies, returning to the full functioning of the single market, gradually and safely restoring freedom of movement for our citizens, in line with the principles of proportionality and non-discrimination, and respecting our fundamental shared values. We will also pay special attention to the tourism industry, which requires a European approach to enable safe tourism flows.

c) The management of migratory flows remains one of the most challenging issues our Union is facing and requires a comprehensive, permanent and fully functioning European response. We look forward to the Commission's proposal of a new European pact on migration and asylum, which should be based on shared responsibility and solidarity, in accordance with article 80 TFEU, and provide tailored assistance to most-affected Member States. We need a more efficient, predictable and resilient system that is able to: manage situations of crisis, disproportionate pressure and structural flows, including secondary movements; ensure the full functioning of the Schengen area; protect external borders; and provide genuine European governance. Increased attention to the external dimension and to strong cooperation with origin and transit countries also remains key.

d) We highlight the strategic importance of the Southern Neighbourhood for Europe. As these countries face difficult challenges exacerbated by the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, Europe should stand by their side. We call for an ambitious revamping of the EU's Southern Neighbourhood policy with appropriate means and resources and favouring a regional approach. In this respect, we look forward to an EU-Southern Neighbourhood ministerial meeting later this year, when circumstances allow. In this context, we also recall the launching of the Barcelona Process 25 years ago and of the Union for the Mediterranean 12 years ago.

e) Regarding the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, we reiterate the European Council Conclusions of December 2019 and the Statement of EU Foreign Ministers of May 15, 2020. We reaffirm our solidarity with Cyprus and Greece and we call on all countries of the region to respect international law, including the law of the sea, and in particular the sovereignty and sovereign rights of EU Member States. A peaceful, stable,

and prosperous Mediterranean region is a fundamental element for the future of Europe and is in the interest of the EU as a whole.

f) We will need to draw all lessons from this crisis to rethink our Union. It is clear that we need to build up European sovereignty, especially in the health sector, so that we can better respond to health crises and reduce EU dependency on foreign suppliers. We will also need to enhance EU autonomy in strategic sectors to ensure European independence and strengthen our industrial base, including SMEs. This also implies a modernisation of European competition policy in support of a strong, efficient and competitive single market, while promoting convergence amongst Member States.

In the same spirit as the Schuman Declaration 70 years ago, overcoming this historical challenge will require more European sovereignty, concrete achievements and real solidarity. To succeed in this endeavor, European citizens must have their say and should be involved closely in this reflection. That is why we support the ongoing work on the Conference on the Future of Europe so that it can be officially launched as soon as possible.

On all these joint priorities, we believe that by working together in the MED7 format we can help make Europe stronger and deliver concrete results in the response to the crisis, to the benefit of our citizens. We will therefore further deepen our cooperation, in particular in view of the next European Council and the upcoming Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern European Union countries.