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HIGHLIGHT

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE *SPECIAL FOCUS* ON COVID-19 AND THE EU

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KEYWORDS: COVID-19 and the EU – European Solidarity – EU Values – EU Policies – EU Competences – New Research Paths.

On 13 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Europe the active centre of the COVID-19 pandemic. One month later, on 14 April 2020, several European Union Member States were among the worst affected in the world.¹ In terms of the highest number of confirmed cases, Spain, Italy, France and Germany arrive, in descending order, just after the United States. In terms of total number of deaths, Italy, Spain and France are, again in descending order, the most bereaved countries in the world. The wave of contaminations is now reaching other continents including America and Africa.

The purpose of this *Forum Special Focus* is not to contrast or compare the unfortunate fate of members of the world's population. On the contrary, the pandemic has highlighted the existence of a common fate of the world's population, reaching far beyond the globalization of economic and digital exchanges. It has revealed a general lack of preparedness for such a scourge, as it made urgent political, health and economic decisions necessary. What will soon be known as the "COVID-19 crisis" thus puts established structures to the test and reveals their strengths and weaknesses. It highlights reflexes and automatisms, intuitive or counterintuitive affinities, and their underlying strategic choices.

The purpose of this *Forum Special Focus* is precisely to work with the urgency that characterizes the crisis itself. There certainly is no academic or researcher in any discipline for whom this unprecedented situation does not raise many questions. More importantly, aren't these questions evolving and constantly changing as the health situation itself evolves? The present initiative does not seek to answer these questions prematurely, but to bring European researchers together to address the interrogation

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¹ Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, coronavirus.jhu.edu.



that currently unites us and has the humble, but hopefully useful, aim of asking the right questions, for opening up a fertile ground for our future research.

Within the framework of the European Union and from the point of view of European integration, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated a variety of reactions, from the unilateral closure of borders by Member States to the collective closure of the Union's external borders. Existing structures, from Schengen to EMU, have been challenged, and new opportunities for cooperation and solidarity have been revealed. National health systems were put to the test of an unprecedented health crisis that has thereby highlighted major inequalities between Member States in terms of equipment and preparedness. Requests for assistance by some Member States have sometimes not been met from within the Union and have partly been addressed by countries outside the Union instead. However, the European Union quickly mobilized resources to find solutions to the COVID-generated economic crisis. All these emergency reactions inevitably raise questions about the existence, substance and extent of European solidarity.

Solidarity is central to the Union's values, which are shared by its Member States.² It will be central to the Union's response to the COVID-19 Crisis and the yardstick against which its failure or success will be measured. The statement of the EU's objectives specifies that within the framework of the common market it is expressed between generations and between Member States³ and, in the context of external action, the Union contributes to solidarity and mutual respect between peoples.⁴ However, European solidarity remains relatively undefined in the detail of the Union's various policies. The dichotomy between the solidarity between Member States and the solidarity between peoples is disappearing in favour of a more institutional vision of European solidarity, designed to articulate the competences of the Union and its Member States in the operation of given policies. It is thus a "political solidarity between Member States" which is central to the operation of various European policies of strategic dimension, and which becomes one of their objectives: the external action of the European Union,⁵ including the solidarity clause⁶ and the development of a common foreign security policy,⁷ the development of an area of freedom, security and justice,⁸ including asylum policy,⁹ economic and monetary policy¹⁰ and energy policy.¹¹

² Art. 2 TEU.

³ Art. 3, para. 3, TEU.

⁴ Art. 3, para. 5, TEU.

⁵ Art. 21, para. 1, TEU.

⁶ Art. 222 TFEU.

⁷ Art. 24, para. 2, Art. 31, para. 1, and Art. 32 TEU.

⁸ Art. 80 TFEU.

⁹ Art. 67 TFEU.

¹⁰ Art. 122 TFEU.

¹¹ Art. 194 TFEU.

The construction of Europe as a driving force for political solidarity between the Member States is therefore the hypothesis that must now be confronted with the reality of the reaction to the COVID-19 crisis in Europe. The methodology adopted is simple: using a pragmatic approach and a deliberately short format, the contributions analyse the initial reactions within the European Union “on the spot”. They recall the facts, the pertinent positive law, and propose conclusions on the relationship between fact and law in order to identify substantial questions requiring further research.

We have chosen an open Special Focus to stimulate debate among academics and researchers. Your proposals for further contributions to this collective effort to map research on “COVID-19 and the EU” are welcome.¹²

¹² To submit *Highlights* or *Insights* to the *European Forum*, please follow this link: www.europeanpapers.eu. Please note that the *European Forum* is multilingual, receiving contributions in English, French, Italian and Spanish.

