
Covid-19 Coronavirus: changes to EU political agenda. Brussels gives reassurances over “breaching” Pact and state aid. Gentiloni, “jobs are priority”

The coronavirus - as is understandable - changes the political agenda of the EU institutions. The EU Parliament has already cancelled the plenary in Strasbourg, which should have started on 30 March, moving it to Brussels on 1 and 2 April. The Commission, with its general directions, is almost completely focused on the response to the epidemic. Even the European Council (meeting of the 27 EU Heads of State and Government), has modified the agenda of the 26-27 March meeting (which may take place on line). COVID-19 is indeed an item on the agenda. “The leaders will discuss how to coordinate efforts to tackle the epidemic at EU level. On 10 March, the members of the European Council have held a videoconference on the issue and have identified four priorities: limiting the spread of the virus; ensuring the provision of medical equipment; promoting research also to find a vaccine; and tackling the socio-economic consequences”. Today, the EU Commissioner for the Economy, Paolo Gentiloni, taking the floor at the Italian TV programme “Uno Mattina”, explained the measures to be adopted at EU level. He explained that there would be more flexibility in the application of the Stability and Growth Pact: “This is not the time to look at the decimals - Gentiloni said -, we should focus on jobs and the future of our economies”. Justified requests for overspending will be accepted as well as any further rise in public debt. Indeed, “coordinated fiscal policies will be promoted to allow Member States to take special measures to address an extraordinary emergency such as the current one”. State aid rules will also be revised. Brussels will keep attention high on any border closures between EU countries of the Schengen area.

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