4th Teleconference R&I DGs on R&I Action on COVID-19

Written Contribution of BELGIUM to the discussion between

the Member States and the European Commission on 14 May 2020

* **Agenda Point "ERAvsCorona Action Plan - State of Play**

General Remarks

When we look at the actions defined in the ERAvsCorona Action Plan and the R&I advisory structures mapping, we strongly support the actions and approaches taken, but little space is given to public health. Indeed, all the aspects of preparedness and responsiveness vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic (or others) from a public health perspective are barely present (e.g. where is the concern with the harmonisation of health information systems or the compatibility of the response systems put in place?). We think there is an opportunity and a need for Europe to play a role in the coordination of **R&I related to public health** too. This perspective must include health aspects related to the **social, socio-economic, cultural, communicational, psychological and psycho-social processes** that influence the health of individuals and populations, with due consideration of social innovations that address inequalities arising from - or reinforced by - the pandemic.

Specific Remarks

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| Points 4, 5 and 10 | The hackathon EUvsVirus selected promising ideas to be taken further. Funding agencies and private parties have expressed interest in some of the ideas to support them with funding. It is very difficult however to identify the contacts and whether they would be eligible for national funding. |
| Point 8 | We strongly support the proposal to integrate the action for the development of a "Population Health Information Research Infrastructure (PHIRI)" into the 2020 Work Programme via an amendment. |
| Point 9 | We would like to replace "that can help to advance the data distribution mechanisms" with "that can help to advance the data access and distribution mechanisms". |

* **Agenda Point "Information on the Ad-Hoc Working Group (Action 1) and Ad-Hoc High Level R&I Task Force on the Coronavirus (Action 7)**

*Do you agree with the main tasks attributed to the Ad-Hoc Working Group on action 1? Do you think that the advisory structures shown in the background document are sufficient in the present situation?*

We agree with the main tasks attributed to the Ad-Hoc Working Group on action 1. However, looking at the 10 actions defined in the ERAvsCorona Action Plan and the R&I advisory structures mapping, we observe that little space is given to public health as such.

The mapping shows that there is a considerable amount of advisory structures covering different issues of the current health crisis. For the time being we do not see the need for the establishment of an Ad-Hoc High Level R&I Task Force (Action 7) as the envisaged tasks of this group (giving advice on possible R&I actions of EU relevance and communicating about coordinated R&I actions to the general public) can be done by existing fora on COVID-19, such as the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 and the COVID-19 Ad-Hoc Group and its sub-groups (Action 1). We also suggest activating the Societal Challenge 1 Programme Committee of Horizon 2020 to support the gathering of input from national experts. This would ensure that specific national issues are taken into account. Information on specific topics could be collected through a template to structure the information.

In the sub-groups on Clinical Trials, Testing and Financing, the Terms of Reference (ToR) have been discussed and the objectives are clearly defined. Rather than losing too much time on the ToR, we think it is now urgent to work on **concrete actions**. For instance, we need to see how cohesion policy can contribute to finding instantaneous solutions, e.g. to have immediate liquidity, to help SMEs, to deploy rapidly existing therapeutics/vaccines solutions and to increase production capacities.

Concerning the establishment of a **steering committee** for the sub-groups, we strongly suggest forming a preparatory group rather than a steering committee. We must avoid ending up with a smaller group within the sub-groups where major decisions such as priority-setting of research activities are taken.

* **Agenda Point "Pledge - State of Play"**

As requested, we have only added to the updated version of the table our additional public R&I investments since 30 January 2020 specifically addressing the challenges associated with COVID-19. The Belgian contribution does not take into account the public R&I funding of on-going research and hence the existing expertise that is relevant to address the pandemic. It is not always easy to draw the line when dealing with running investments in COVID-19 R&I related actions. The room for interpretation of this request should refrain from any comparison between countries. We recommend a common agreed approach to ensure that the desired information is correctly collected.

* **Agenda Point "Discussion on Next Steps and Conclusions"**

R&I in the recovery should also address:

* Prevention and preventive measures to be based on scientific analyses. We should ensure the measures taken across the EU are more aligned and taken in a concerted manner;
* The pathophysiology of the disease and its longer term effects;
* The preparation for the expected next peak of COVID-19 and other outbreaks, including from AMR pathogens.

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