EU calls for ramp-up in production on vital medical equipment

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EU Internal market chief Thierry Breton also warned EU Member States to remove any barriers to free movement of medical supplies.

Thierry Breton, EU commissioner for internal market and services, has called on EU national governments to increase the production of vital medical equipment, in a video address to MEPs on Thursday.

Breton also said the EU would work to overcome “unjustified obstructions” at borders in Europe and that Europe’s small businesses had, “a vital role to play” in ensuring Europe’s industries continue to operate during the COVID-19 crisis.
The EU’s single market chief also said he had recently met several European company heads about increasing production of ventilators and masks “in the next 15 days”.

He told a specially convened meeting of the European Parliament’s internal market committee that the “world is confronted by an unprecedented threat and Europe is at the centre of this crisis.”

He said, “This virus knows no borders so it’s the responsibility of all of us to act urgently and boldly. Europe right now needs to show that ‘solidarity’ is not just a motto but a moral compass to guide us”.

“The single market has to come up with some solutions to the crisis and it’s imperative we allow the single market to continue working properly at the present time. “I have been repeating the same message now for three weeks: keep the single market in place.”

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The ‘virtual’ meeting was also an opportunity for the commissioner to raise concerns about the use of restrictive border measures in some Member States that may be blocking the distribution of essential goods, such as medical gear and food, reaching those who need them the most.

Breton warned, “Those obstacles and restrictive measures which have been put in place in some Member States to close borders and prevent access for goods, particularly medical equipment such as protective masks, are counter-productive and inappropriate.”

He told the meeting there were “still problems” with free movement in Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

Member States, he said, needed reminding of their duty, “under the treaties to remove any national prohibitions on the movement of goods so that goods can pass freely through the EU.”

The EU was also, explained Breton, trying to push for an increase in the production of “vital medical equipment”. However, he cautioned, “There are issues about standards regarding the manufacture of such things that need to be in place. But Europe should be self-sufficient in the availability of vital supplies such as ventilators and masks.”

Belgian Greens deputy Petra De Sutter, the committee chair, as well as a handful of MEPs were the only ones present in the meeting room. MEPs were able to participate remotely.
“We need to engender a feeling of togetherness and the single market works on a level basis. We see clearer than ever how essential the work of frontline staff is.”

Despite the stark surroundings, De Sutter, said of the two hour virtual meeting with Breton, “Our role as a parliament is to scrutinise what the Commission is doing and communicate this to the outside world.”

Breton concluded by addressing the economic impact of the crisis, saying “We have not seen anything like this before but need to look to the future and the ‘day after’ as well and make sure we provide financial support to those who need it.

“We are in very unusual circumstances and this means we may have to look at non-conventional approaches in dealing with this.” He added that he hoped the crisis would be “a catalyst to improve what we are doing.”

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About the author

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