

Rethinking Covid-19 Policy Responses Of EU Institutions

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) has been fighting against a crisis brought by the Covid-19 since the year 2020. This paper aims to discuss the measures taken by the EU institutions. Member states have had conventional reactions even though the pandemic has been an unconventional threat. However, solutions limited to national level and conventional reactions have been damaging to European integration. The paper limits the research with evaluating the policy responses of Council of the EU, European Commission and European Parliament to Covid-19. Methodologically the paper is based upon qualitative data gathered from the official documents, related news in the mainstream global media and Eurobarometer public opinion polls since March 2020. It is argued in the paper that those three

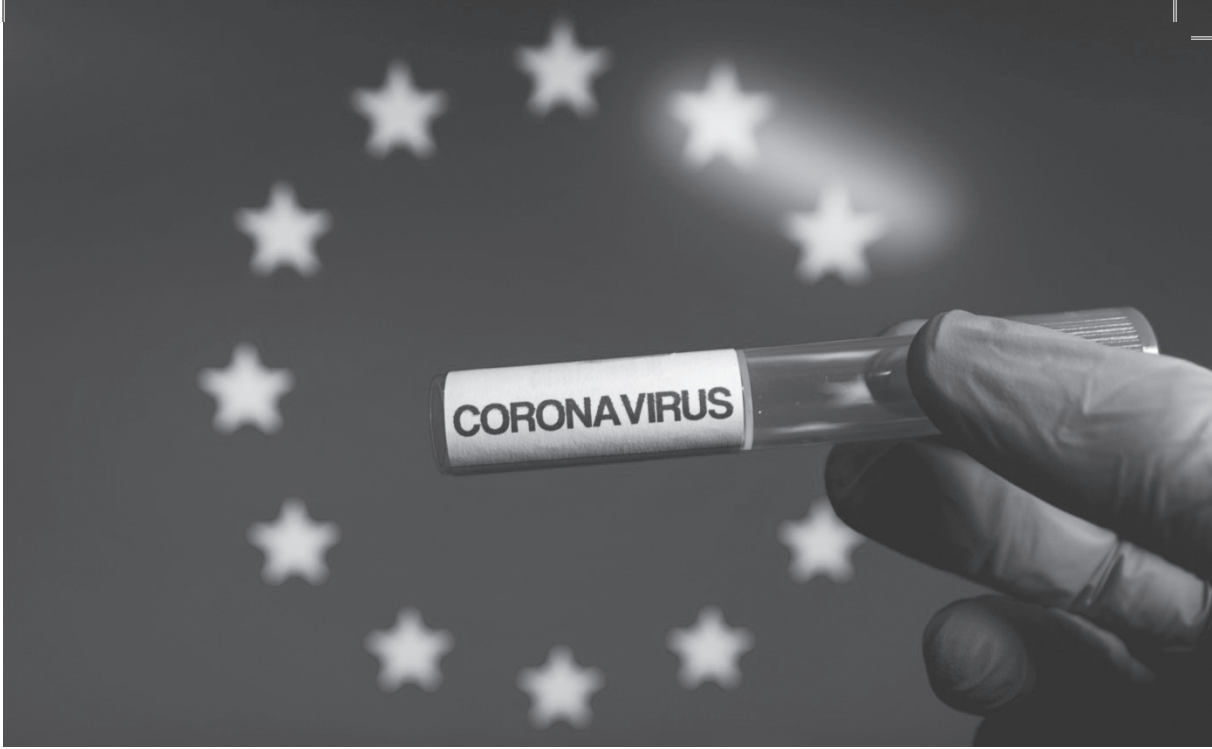
institutions have been reflecting the differentiated faces of the Union in tackling the crisis. Therefore, it is concluded that the EU has needed to take into account the increased voice of the European Parliament on Covid-19 measures in order to promote solidarity in the continent and to protect European integration.

Keywords: Covid-19, EU Institutions, Council of the EU, European Commission, European Parliament

Introduction

Covid-19 has deeply influenced every single person, family and society in the world. It has changed many habits, added new social realities, and transformed our ways of thinking and belongings. Europe as one of the wealthiest places in the world has experienced insurmountable results

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since many of the states in Europe are not prepared for a health crisis. The security oriented policies of European countries and normative role of the European Union (EU) has had no clear-cut plans to stop a pandemic, and it has had no institutions and even instruments to manage this unconventional crisis.

Since this pandemic has expanded in the streets, homes and every social sphere, it has social results. This paper aims to explain the efforts of the main EU institutions, namely, the Council of the EU, European Commission and European Parliament over the Covid-19 crisis. The earlier crises regarding the EU such as the Eurozone crisis, migration crisis and Brexit are taken into account by EU institutions within the framework of EU economy and European security. Nevertheless, Covid-19 has been an unconventional crisis that both the

EU has not been prepared for and it needs a more different approach than the earlier ones.

As declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, Covid-19 spread fastest in European countries compared with the world. Thus crisis management which has had significant social and economic results has become an urgent task for the European states. The international society has been familiar with the solidarity crisis in the EU because of the past experiences in previous crises. The member states have not been following common policies over the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, European security and defense policy, populism, the rise of far right parties and migration crisis. Furthermore, policies on social health have not existed in the list of the EU's agenda until the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EU has always declared security and economic policies as the areas of high politics. Since other areas are ignored, Italy and Spain have been the deeply influenced EU member states with 129,919 Covid-19 deaths in Italy and 85,290 Covid-19 deaths in Spain until September 2021 (Worldometer, 13 September 2021). These states have been too disadvantaged against Covid-19 with their fragile economy and elderly population. Even though Italy and Spain were alarmingly influenced by the pandemic, the European partners did not hear their voices at the first phase of the crisis. Therefore, European solidarity as a principle of the EU has failed retrospectively. Covid-19 has resulted in a European identity crisis in addition to deep social and economic crises throughout the continent. This identity crisis has been a non-military security threat and exposed possible existential risks with the reflections of Covid-19 (Deen and Kruijver, 2020). The late measures of the EU to overcome the pandemic have been criticized especially by the deeply influenced member states and European citizens. Since March 2020, the EU has been shaping its policies within the scope of Covid-19 reality. The paper firstly explains Covid-19 as an unconventional threat over European integration; and secondly sheds light on the measures taken by the main EU institutions, namely the Council of the EU, European Commission and European Parliament to protect and reconstruct the integration during and after Covid-19.

1. Covid-19 as an Unconventional Threat over the European Union

The concept of 'unconventional threat' encompasses invisible threats to survival no matter how much military preparedness has been ensured (Nurhasanah, Napang and Rohman, 2020). "*Climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, drug trafficking, information security and transnational crime*" have been the new age threats in the post-Cold War era (Caballero-Anthony, 2016). In 2019, Covid-19 as an invisible threat to human security has brought a new dimension of security understandings of states and the EU as a supranational organization.

The EU has had numerous crises from the early years of the integration until recently. The most influential crises have been bombings in Europe after the September 11 attacks, Eurozone crisis, Brexit, migration influx from particularly Syria and currently Covid-19. While the earlier crises have been regarded as economic and security crises, Covid-19 has not been regarded within the same limits since it has exposed very plainly social and psychological consequences. Therefore, member states and the EU could not get organized under common goals and searched for national solutions to the pandemic until March 2020.

Fast spread of Covid-19 from China to Europe has resulted in tremendous

changes in economic, political, social, security and health areas. After Italy, the Covid-19 disease has spread very fast to Spain, the United Kingdom and France. Insufficiencies in the Italian health sector made the state to demand for masks and other medical equipment from the EU member states. However, rather than the EU countries, China and Russia sent masks and health personnel to Italy. Thus, Italian citizens were angered with the policies of the remaining EU countries (Eurofound, 6 May 2020). France had also prevented the exportation of masks produced by a Swedish company to Italy. The French government returned the equipment to the company after its protectionist policy had been criticized by various non-state actors and states (Yetim, 2020). These developments have made the EU's solidarity principle dysfunctional in the first days of the pandemic.

The Solidarity principle is laid down in Article 222 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) which entered into force in 2009. It is stated in this clause that:

"The EU and member states have the option to act jointly; to prevent the terrorist threat in the territory of an EU country; to provide assistance to another EU country which is the victim of a natural or man-made disaster" (TFEU, a.222).

2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid was the first case that the EU operated the

solidarity clause. Currently, Covid-19 has forced the member states to show a prudent course of actions without damaging European solidarity. After the spread of the Covid-19 to the whole European continent, the center of the pandemic was replaced to Europe in March 2020. Regarding this development, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen proposed to ban Schengen visits for 30 days. The proposal was approved on 17 March 2020. Unexpectedly, some of the member states such as Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Hungary closed their borders even to the Schengen states. Additionally, France suggested increasing measures within the Schengen Area. Further to that, the leader of the far right political party, the then National Front Party, Le Pen, called upon to close borders to Italy (Hatip, 2020). It is obvious that free movement of persons has been one of the basic rights within the Union. Furthermore, passports and identity cards are important signals of European identity construction efforts of the EU. In those documents, European identity can be seen as the upper identity of European citizens (Pogonyi, 2019).

The decisions and suggestions at national level on Schengen rules have eroded the vision of Europeanness in the eyes of the European citizens. Since the EU has no supranational authority on the health sector, the member states initiated to solve problems

related to Covid-19 with their national problem-solving mechanisms. Von der Leyen admitted that the EU had been in a “*vacuum*” since the member states had followed unilateral policies in tackling the pandemic (Schmitt-Roschmann, 2020).

Concerning the unilateral policies, job losses, discrimination over minorities and migrants in addition to dramatic position of the old population, pandemic has created an unconventional crisis within the EU. Even though European integration has experienced several crises since the 1960s, none of them have been so influential for European society (Aybar, p. 109). The EU has not noticed the potential existential threats until Covid-19. While terrorism, migrants and radical Islamic organizations have been amongst the main security concerns of the EU, environment, viruses, health policies have not been on the agenda of EU elites and the European Council for a long time.

The European leaders have taken action against the deadly results of Covid-19 lately. The EU budget for the term 2021-2027 which includes the components like Digitalization, Cohesion Fund, Green Deal and the fight for Covid-19 has shown that the EU started to implement sophisticated policies to protect and promote European integration (European Commission, 21 July 2021). The Commission President Ursula von der Leyen states that the budget has

shown the member states’ trust in the integration. President of the European Council, Charles Michel also considers the budget as “*a success for member states, but especially for the people*” (Council of the EU, 21 July 2021).

While EU bureaucrats have been stressing on the new efforts to combat with Covid-19 and the impact of those efforts over European society, the public opinion polls draw attention to various threats over Europe and European citizens for years. Eurobarometer surveys in 2015 and 2017 indicate the challenges to European security in the eyes of Europeans. While Europeans’ concerns on natural disasters were 80 per cent and man-made disasters were 79 per cent in 2015; their concerns on both of the disasters increased to 89 per cent in 2017. That increase has shown shared points of European citizens over European security and how those concerns have been continuously ignored by the EU leaders. In 2021, the European citizens have maintained stress on their concerns. The Eurobarometer survey on EU Civil Protection upheld in April 2021 has proven that 84 percent of European citizens support the EU’s coordinated actions in crises such as Covid-19 and natural disasters. It has also come out that more than 9 in 10 European citizens support their country’s financial or social assistance to another EU country if an extraordinary incident happens. This result has been interpreted as a search for EU solidarity by the European cit-

izens (Eurobarometer, April 2021). A very recent Eurobarometer survey on Climate Change has also uncovered that the most important problems for European citizens are natural disasters and climate change (Eurobarometer, July 2021).

In respect to the developments and public opinion poll results mentioned above, the words of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez are summarizing the solidarity and identity crisis of the EU:

“Millions of Europeans believe in the European Union. We must not abandon them. We must give them reasons to keep believing. We must act now or never, because right at this moment, Europe itself is at stake” (Sanchez, 5 April 2020).

2. European Commission's Response to Covid-19

The European Commission with commissioners from 27 EU member states has been the leading EU institution in the process of tackling with Covid-19. However, the Commission has reacted later than expected against the member states' policies violating the principle of solidarity in the EU. Increased voices in European civil society and Eurobarometer surveys have reinvigorated the Commission to take responsibility over the largest crisis in Europe.

The presidency of Ursula von der Leyen established a Coronavirus Response Team standing on three

pillars. Economy pillar, health pillar and transportation/travel pillar are the pillars on which the Commission has aimed to regularize in order to meet the needs that are increased with Covid-19 (European Commission, n.d.). In the economy pillar, the Commission has started the State Aid Temporary Framework on 19 March 2020. It is agreed that the Framework will be in force until 31 December 2021 in order to empower the European economy (European Commission, 28 January 2021). Another economic measure taken by the Commission has been SURE Program (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risk in an Emergency) started in 2020 to provide financial support for the badly influenced member states in order to prevent floating in employment (European Commission, 27 October 2020). In the Program, European workers have been the focus group to guarantee their employment in jobs and to combat unemployment (European Commission, 25 September 2020). In October 2020, the Commission firstly disbursed €17 billion to Italy, Spain and Poland under the SURE Program. Secondly, in November 2020, the Commission disbursed €14 billion to nine EU countries most of which located in the Mediterranean region (European Commission, 7 November 2020). And thirdly, in May 2021, €14.137 billion has been disbursed to twelve EU member states (European Commission, 25 May 2021). In addition to European workers in the member states, the Commission has



also aimed to guarantee the rights of seasonal workers within the EU. In this regard, the local and national authorities, employers and workers are informed about their rights, especially with respect to health and safety (European Commission, 16 July 2021).

Not only the European workers, but also European businesses are important components of the EU economy. The European Commission has agreed to support European businesses under the Capital Markets Recovery Package. The Package came into force in July 2021 to empower the European businesses to overcome the effects of Covid-19 through increasing the level of investments and guaranteeing recovery of the businesses and banks (European Commission, 24 July 2021).

In the economic pillar, the Multiannual Financial Framework between (MFF) 2021 and 2027 has been on the Commission's urgent agenda of measures against Covid-19. NextGenerationEU is one of the components of MFF, and it is agreed as an instrument of the EU for recovery from Covid-19. This instrument has been the Commission's funding mechanism through the loans from the market. It is agreed that €800 billion in total will be disbursed by the Commission to the member states until 2027. In order to achieve this goal, to meet the needs of member states, to promote investments in Europe and to empower the euro in global markets, Coronavirus Response Team at European Commission has agreed to increase the funding of NextGenerationEU until July 2021 (European Commission, 14 April 2021; 15 June 2021; 13 July 2021).

The disasters and fast climate change in the 2000s have forced the EU to reformulate EU Civil Protection Mechanism in 2019. RescEU has been introduced by the European Commission as an important component under this Mechanism. RescEU aims to protect European citizens and citizens in the partner countries from the disasters and future risks through the reserve of resources including firefighting helicopters, planes, medical tools and field hospitals (European Commission, 2019). European Commission's financial and medical support to neighbor, candidate and potential candidate countries have been measured in both economic and health pillars. Under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, Romania has deployed more than 50,000 doses of vaccines to Moldova. Under RescEU Program, European Commission has delivered medical support to North Macedonia and Montenegro (European Commission, 27 March 2021). Commission has also started €70 million financial support for the Western Balkan countries within the scope of Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA II). With this new initiative, vaccination equipment and vaccines for priority groups in Western Balkans are aimed to be guaranteed by the EU (European Commission, 28 December 2020).

Measures in the health pillar have been centered on Covid-19 vaccines. Commission has purchased vaccines produced by AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Johnson & John-

son, CureVac, Moderna and BioNTech-Pfizer since August 2020 (European Commission, 9 September 2020). It is aimed to secure the exports of Covid-19 vaccines. In exports, the basic point for European citizens has been transparency of the vaccines since justice in the penetration of vaccines has been questioned by the European public. This policy has made the member states authorize the transparency and timely access to the vaccines (European Commission, 29 January 2021).

In February 2021, the European Commission has proposed a new action, HERA Incubator, to get prepared for new variants of Covid-19, possible future pandemics or illnesses. With this action, it is aimed to finance new research on health, viruses or pandemic and encourage the development of new vaccines for the protection of public health (European Commission, 17 February 2021). The Commission has maintained its support to urgent research on pandemic with €123 million budget under Horizon Europe (European Commission, 22 July 2021).

On 31 August 2021, the European Commission declared that 70 per cent of all of the European citizens (approximately 256 million adults in the EU) have been vaccinated and this has been a great achievement of the Union. Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety stressed on the role of solidarity in

crisis times with the following words: *“This is a collective achievement of the EU and its Member States that shows what is possible when we work together with solidarity and in coordination”* (European Commission, 31 August 2021). This percentage can also be seen as the success of the European citizens who are well-informed about the ill-effects of non-vaccination and care the health of every single person in Europe and also in the world.

In the health pillar, the European Commission has given special importance to the multilateral response to Covid-19. EU’s support to COVAX Facility (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access) has been the product of this belief and until recently 200 million doses of vaccination has been completed in 138 countries (European Commission, 31 August 2021). COVAX, established in April 2020, is a global facility supported by civil organizations, World Health Organization and the EU. It is aimed to complete vaccination of every person especially in the lower income countries. The European Commission has guaranteed 2,6 billion doses from vaccine producers to send particularly to Western Balkans, neighboring countries and Africa (European Commission, Global, n.d.).

In July 2021, to increase EU’s preparedness for future pandemics, the Commission has underlined the following matters below:

“...testing, contact tracing, improved public health surveillance and widened access to medical countermeasures, measures on healthcare surge capacity, non-pharmaceutical countermeasures, support to minorities and vulnerable persons, and activities to reduce the burden of seasonal flu” (European Commission, 15 July 2021).

Future plans have been discussed in the G20 Summit -Global Health Summit- which was held in May 2021 in Rome under the chairmanship of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi (European Commission, 21 May 2021). This Summit has given a special emphasis to develop new policies to combat with Covid-19 and any possible pandemic.

In the transportation/travel pillar, the Commission has published communication documents and has called member states to implement the Recommendations of the Council. In the March 2021 Communication document, the Commission draws attention to the previous lessons and has invited member states to apply the restrictions set by the Council. The Commission states that the Digital Green Certificate should be a tool for European citizens to maintain their free movement rights and guarantee the public health standards. The Commission has also announced that the tourism sector should be empowered with measures such as Coronavirus

Response Investment Initiative, ReactEU, Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion policy funds (European Commission, 17 March 2021).

The European Commission has been the key EU institution in managing the crises. Covid-19 has prompted the Commission to bring vital matters to the EU's agenda and take early measures in order to be resilient against any possible crises. The presidency's efforts, the recent programs and facilities have been rewarding instruments of the Commission to maintain the construction of 'trust' in European integration. A Eurobarometer survey, conducted in April 2021, has proven this positive development. While 43 per cent of European citizens trust in the EU in 2020, it has increased to 49 per cent in 2021. This percentage has been the highest level in the EU since 2008 (European Commission, 23 April 2021).

3. The Council's Response to Covid-19

Covid-19 has firstly influenced the elderly in Europe which means that it has had particularly societal results. However, the dimensions of the impact of Covid-19 have broadened and they turned into huge problems in front of the EU since member states did not have sufficient capacity to fight with the reflections of the pandemic. After the steps taken by the European Commission and European Parliament, the member states and the Council started to make initiatives to revive European solidarity.

President of the Council, Charles Michel, proposed a recovery plan for the member states together with the President of European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (Council of the EU, 21 April 2020). In July 2020, €750 billion recovery plan -NextGeneration EU- and €1074 billion long-term EU budget for 2021-2027 was agreed by the EU leaders to tackle with the effects of pandemic (Council of the EU, 17-21 July 2020). With a proposal by European Commission, the Council which is composed of presidents or prime ministers of the member states has also agreed on starting EU4Health Program between 2021-2027. The Program aims to make EU member states' health systems more resilient and bring innovative practices. While the budget of the Program for the period of 2014-2020 had been €450 million, the current budget has been 25 times higher than that (Council of the EU, 12 June 2020). The European Parliament gave consent to the proposed multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the Council started to adopt new budget which is worth to €1,8 trillion including the NextGeneration funding (Council of the EU, 17 December 2020). The point drawing attention in the MFF has been the establishment of Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) which has a budget of €672,5 billion under NextGenerationEU recovery fund. Through the Facility, the EU aims to provide economic and social support including green and digital transitions to the member states influenced

by the Covid-19 (Council of the EU, 11 February 2021). The first member state which applied to take support from RRF has been Portugal, one of the adversely affected member states (Council of the EU, n.d.).

New arrangements in the budget and financial instruments have been the first steps of the Council. The second step taken by the Council has been vaccination of all European citizens and the implementation of EU Digital Covid Certificate within the EU borders (Council of the EU, 24-25 June 2021). It is agreed that vaccination of at least 70 per cent of the EU adult population will serve to the societal recovery of the continent. Since 27 December 2020, vaccination of European citizens has been maintained. In addition, it is also agreed that the EU Digital Covid Certificate of each European citizen will be valid in all member states (Council of the EU, 1 July 2021).

The Council of the EU has called a coordinated approach on limiting the free movement of persons in the EU since October 2020. It is recommended by the member states to follow a common mapping system of Covid-19, common action in bringing travel restrictions, measures such as testing and self-quarantine, and raising awareness in European society (Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020).

After the spread of Covid-19, the Council has presented a new approach to policy-making which prioritizes research and innovation to tackle newly arising threats in the world. By the help of new financial instruments mentioned above, the EU aims to increase the efficiency of the European Research Area not only for economic well-being but also for the health of the European society (Heitor, 26 February 2021). Within this framework, the Council agreed to allocate €95,5 billion for research and innovation under Horizon Europe for the years between 2021-2027 (Council of the EU, 16 March 2021).

The Council's recent approaches and policies reflect the principle 'health comes first'. On a national level, health has been the most important concern of Europeans with 44 per cent with a 13 percentage point increase since 2020 according to the data provided by Eurobarometer survey in April 2021 (European Commission, 23 April 2021). Rather than the national plans, Europe-wide plans including financial and social support mechanisms have more to the point results as can be seen in budgetary measures, recent health and social programs started after Covid-19.

4. European Parliament's Response to Covid-19

The European Parliament with 705 members from 27 EU member states has been stressing on the humanitarian effects of Covid-19 both at the EU

level and global level. Excess deaths associated with Covid-19 have made the Parliament take measures against the future crises. The urgent decision on the EU Solidarity Fund in April 2020 has been one of the steps of the Parliament together with the Council. This fund provided €800 million financial support to member states in 2020 (European Parliamentary Research Service, n.d.).

Covid-19 has brought the establishment of the Recovery Fund and the new MFF in the term of 2021-2027 and many new instruments in the EU. To find out European citizens' reactions during Covid-19 crisis, the European Parliament authorized a survey center, Kantar, in April 2020. According to the data provided from this survey, three out of four European citizens stated that they had an idea about the measures taken by the EU. 33 per cent of the respondents stated that they have been informed about the scope of the measures. However, half of those people underlined that the measures have not completely met the needs of European citizens. The survey showed that 60 per cent of the respondents criticized the member states for not putting into practice the solidarity principle during the crisis. 58 per cent of the respondents stated that they are not satisfied with the EU measures and 69 per cent pointed out that the EU should have taken more measures to combat the Covid-19 crisis (European Parliament, June 2020).

The reflections in the society have made the European Parliament to focus on Covid-19, future of Europe and EU Climate Law in 2021. As can be seen from these agenda titles, the European Parliament has more differentiated approaches than the European Commission and the Council. In March 2021, a new EU4Health Programme was agreed by the European Parliament to empower the health-care systems in the EU and to get prepared for future health crises (European Parliament, 9 March 2021). Therefore, while the last two have been dealing with maximizing the interests of the member states in general, the European Parliament prioritizes human life and the rights of European citizens. For instance, with the Conference on the Future of Europe in May 2021, Parliament started a mechanism through which European citizens have the opportunity to share their ideas on European integration.

Covid-19 has proven that environment, climate and pandemics are interrelated. European citizens and their representatives in the Parliament are aware of this fact. Accordingly, the Parliament has approved EU Climate Law in June 2021. It is aimed to reduce emissions by at least 55 per cent until 2030. Furthermore, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and Life Programme for 2021-2027 have been started with the goals of protecting the environment and climate. Another tool to protect the environment has been The Circular Economy

Action Plan adopted by the European Parliament, in 2021. The Plan *“aims to achieve a sustainable, toxic-free and fully circular economy by 2050 at the latest”* (European Parliament, 23 July 2021).

Financial assistance has been maintained as an indispensable tool since the effects of Covid-19 are still huge. To relieve the member states and the European public, the Parliament agreed on €672,5 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility under the Covid-19 recovery plan, in February 2021. Through this Facility, it is aimed to surmount economic and social crises and to promote sustainability and digitalization in the EU (European Parliament, 10 February 2021).

The European Parliament has a special stress on the citizenship rights within the scope of the EU’s vaccination policy. It also aims to promote an increase in the production of vaccines. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) stressed on the emergency to act in solidarity not only in the EU, but also in the global context. MEPs stated that transparency of the EU should be a serious priority to gain the trust of European citizens over the EU’s vaccination strategies. It is also suggested by the MEPs to monitor the EU’s efforts on vaccination since a big share in the budget is composed of Recovery Fund (European Parliament, 10 February 2021).

EU citizenship rights have gained a different dimension with the enact-

ment of EU Covid-19 Certificate by the European Parliament, on 8 June 2021. It is announced by the Parliament that the Certificate should be in effect for only 12 months in order to protect the principle of right to free movement. This Certificate shows if the person is vaccinated, tested negative or recovered from the Covid-19. However, the European Parliament draws attention to free movement of persons and states that the Certificate is and cannot be a precondition for free movement. The Certificate is prepared for protecting public health in Europe. MEPs stressed that it should not turn into a discrimination tool for the people who are not vaccinated for economic reasons. In this respect, Parliament summoned the member states to *“ensure universal, accessible, timely and free of charge testing”* (European Parliament, 29 April 2021). In June 2021, parliamentarians also announced that intellectual property rights should be lifted in order to reach the highest numbers in Covid-19 vaccines globally (European Parliament, 10 June 2021).

Juan Fernando López Aguilar, a representative of Socialists & Democrats in European Parliament stressed on the indispensable principle of right to free movement with the following words: *“We want to send out the message to European citizens that we are doing everything we can to restore freedom of movement”* (European Parliament, 9 June).

Several MEPs in the European Parliament have also stressed on their concerns related to the Certificate. Sophie in 't Veld from the Renew Europe stated that the member states should guarantee the freedom of movement for European citizens since they *“desperately want to regain their freedom”*. She also added: *“It isn't the virus that has taken away their right to free movement in Europe. It is actually the patchwork of national rules that makes it impossible for them to move around”* (European Parliament, 9 June 2021).

Joachim Stanisław Brudziński from European Conservatives and Reformists added that the Certificate is not a condition to move in Europe freely. Therefore the people who have not been vaccinated have also freedom to move with some restrictions such as *“tests, self-isolation, or quarantine”*. Christine Anderson from Identity and Democracy Group stated that there have been concerns if European citizens could be forced to be vaccinated after the enactment of the Certificate (European Parliament, 9 June 2021).

The European Parliament with directly elected European representatives has been following more diverse policies than the aforementioned EU institutions in the name of European citizens. Prioritizing the rights and expectations of the European citizens has led the Parliament to influence other EU institutions to take measures without violating the rights as can be seen in actions related to Covid-19

vaccination and the Certificate. As a result, the increased role of the Parliament in the decision-making system forces other EU institutions to take into consideration the Parliament and public opinion in recent actions.

Conclusion

The EU has been witnessing a new turning point with Covid-19 in its integration history since 2020. Several crises such as the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, migration crisis have shaped the integration process and the future of the EU but nothing like the pandemic. Economic and market-oriented roots of the Union have resulted in the neglect of health policies and the environment. Although the member states have profoundly followed policies at national level in the early stages of Covid-19, they have learned from the fatal results and stopped to neglect the voice of European citizens.

The three main institutions namely, the Council of the European Union, European Commission and European Parliament have been playing key roles in the fight against the pandemic. The new budget for 2021-2027 term and measures taken by the EU institutions have been the signals of Covid-19 as a motive power for strengthening the EU solidarity and European identity. It is urgent for European elites to take care of the needs of European citizens and the voice of the European Parliament and promote capacity building through the actions by the Council and the Eu-

European Commission to get prepared for possible unconventional threats in the future.

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