

MP OPEN CALL

Your Direct Line to Europe's Policymakers

Mercator European Dialogue

2 November 2020

Despite the current challenges to exchanging and sharing information, the **Mercator European Dialogue** carries on in its firm commitment to strengthen dialogue between policymakers across Europe by providing a neutral, informal, and accessible space for discussion. This October, we launched the **MP Open Call** series, inviting members of the network to join regular open-agenda conversations.

On 2 November 2020, participants of the second MP Open Call shared their views on the communication strategies used by politicians to announce lockdowns and the reactions of citizens across Europe, as well as the direct consequences of isolation measures on their parliamentary work.

Conversation highlights

- **Anti-lockdown protests spread across Europe.**

The members of parliament discussed different forms of resistance and possible causes.

- On Sunday 1 November, **Covid-19 skeptics rallied in Munich** at a [protest rebranded as a "mass"](#) which allowed for a higher number of participants (>1.000) than a political demonstration (<1.000).
- "It is appalling to see the amount of **disinformation on social media** these days."
- **Lockdown measures are not always coherent** (local and national level), nor consistent across sectors: this can create confusing outcomes.

- **How can politicians foster the adequate feeling of alarm to make sure citizens follow rules and avoid the spread of the virus?**

Participants gave a few examples of insights they had had based on their recent experiences:

- Relaxing, and then again tightening seems to be causing more distress than a smooth gradual reopening of the economy.
- An extremely polarizing conversation is still going on about what is to be considered an essential and a non-essential job/business. Are museums and art galleries essential or not? What happens to people working in this sector? How to explain to actors and performers that they must stop working when other shops remain open? Couldn't the same health and safety measures apply?
- Even in Germany, small businesses that have been labelled as non-essential and had to shut down in March are now struggling to re-open at all, despite having received financial support as people are isolating at home.
- "Compared to the first lockdown, where a widespread sense of solidarity was felt, there seems to be a more selfish response from citizens now."
- "Lockdowns are not making Covid-19 disappear, but they at least help to keep number of Covid19 cases manageable."
- "It is key to manage expectations. Health experts have told me that a pandemic usually lasts for 2-4 years."

- **As Covid-19 numbers grow, contact tracing becomes impossible.**

In the German city of Augsburg, the toll of infected persons has risen to one in every 170 inhabitants. High numbers were also registered in the regions closest to the border between Germany and Austria. Here, the sudden increase could be explained by cross-border traffic to Austria, where restrictions were more lenient during much of the past months. Ultimately, this situation has led to comprehensive contact tracing becoming impossible.

- **Parliaments can do a lot beyond exercising their legislative power during a crisis.**

A lot is being said about the fact that this is the “hour of the executive” and that parliaments, in particular opposition parties, have been sidelined in the decision-making process. Participants discussed whether they feel that this is the case in their countries:

- “As a policymaker I do not feel that I have nothing to do or that I am out of work. I can talk with citizens, stay close to them, make them feel at ease as much as I can. So, I think it is ok if the government is having a greater role right now. There is enough we can do in addition to our legislative duty.”
- “We are in a crisis and it is an exceptional moment. People call me, there are support programs to implement. We are the first responders.”

- **There is an online meeting fatigue that affects us all. Video calls start early in the morning and end late in the evening.**

“It is very hard to engage with large crowds online. This is something we have not cracked yet, but we see we are not alone. Even newspapers, public broadcasters, or other institutions that used to hold successful events with huge audiences are struggling immensely.”

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Read up on the topics of the call

We have compiled research on the topics of the call in a [convenient overview here](#).

What more can we do to drive the conversation forward?

Please remember that the MED is a network that is **MP-driven**. If you have any suggestions on how to take the conversation to the next level or continue digging deeper into the challenges posed by COVID-19, we would like to hear from you.

All members have **power of initiative** and they are always encouraged to volunteer their expertise on a subject relevant for other members’ parliamentary work. Please contact our Head of Strategic Engagement **Ronith Schalast** at rschalast@gmfus.org to discover how we can support you.

You can also find contact details of all MED members on the **members-only area of the website**, which is accessible [here](#). Should you have issues logging in, you can contact rschalast@gmfus.org.