

EU shamefaced over Italy as China rides to the rescue

*The EU's response to Italy's Coronavirus crisis has been shameful, writes blogger **Raedwald**. Supposed European solidarity has been notable by its absence: France and Germany have banned the export of medical equipment to Italy, and it has been left to China to supply the Italians with much-needed medical supplies. This article originally appeared on Raedwald's blog [here](#), and we are grateful for his permission to re-publish.*

Back in 2019, lost in the Brexit noise, Italy became the first big EU nation and the first member of the G7 to sign up to China's Belt and Road initiative. China had infuriated Brussels by introducing a strategic development plan to Europe in which they had no hand; China targeted the Mediterranean states, the closest parts of the EU to ships low in the water with Chinese goods. The EU was still squabbling over the interests of the northern EU, Rotterdam and Hamburg, which had the lion's share of Chinese imports. As The Diplomat reported, the China-Italy MoU was comprehensive:

... aiming at a strategic partnership covering a broad range of areas such as trade, investment, finance, transportation, logistics, infrastructure, connectivity, sustainable development, mobility and cooperation, also involving third countries. Notably, the area of telecommunications was left out of the agreement.

Well, this week Europe was sharply reminded of that agreement. At a time when France and Germany banned the export of medical equipment to Italy, China rapidly arranged to airfreight millions of masks, gowns, eyeshields, hectolitres of alcohol

gel and even respirators, thanking Italy for the care provided to the 300,000 Chinese expats working in northern Italy, and re-committing to the friendship between the two nations. The South China Morning Post reported on a telephone call between the nations' foreign ministers:

During the phone call on Tuesday, Wang told Di Maio that China would not forget "the precious support" from Italy when "we were at the hardest moment fighting the epidemic". "Now, we are willing to stand firmly by the side of the Italian people," the Chinese foreign minister said.

"Although currently China itself still has great demand for medical materials, we will overcome the difficulties and offer material aid, including face masks, to Italy, and increase exports of materials and equipment to meet Italy's urgent need," Wang said. "If the Italian side requires it, China would also like to send medical teams to assist in combating the virus," he said.

The response of the EU to the challenge has been, at the least, confused. Whilst Rishi Sunak yesterday committed £30bn to counter the effects of the virus in the UK, the EU's response has been to protect the banks and the interests of the ECB. A measly €7.5bn has been committed for all 27 EU nations, and Brussels has announced plans to co-ordinate the distribution of medical protective supplies. When it whined to EU nations that health was a national competence, it raised only anger. The EU has been for years acting, setting up organisations, sitting on committees as though it were the European Health Authority – now it's proven to be a hollow pretence.

As AE-P writes in the 'graph, Sunak and Carney have shamed the EU:

The EU's legalistic spending machinery will limit any fiscal punch and slow the roll out of crisis measures.

There are still no eurobonds, no shared budget, and no mutualised pan-eurozone deposit insurance for banks, which leaves vulnerable Italy in the worst of all worlds: deprived of sovereign economic instruments yet without EU fiscal support to compensate.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that 70pc of Germans could be infected but failed to draw the economic conclusions. She spoke of a €25bn EU crisis package – less than 0.2pc of GDP – and but proffered no fiscal emergency spending for Germany itself beyond a trivial €275m for health care. Fiscal stabilisers will have to carry the load.

Italian voters will not easily forget either the actions of France and Germany, or the inaction of the EU. Nor will they forget the assistance given by China at a time when her own people are not past the crisis. I've no doubt that there will be those in Brussels who see Covid-19 as just another 'beneficial crisis' that will allow the *Federasts* to ratchet up control. This time it may just be a crisis too far.