

EU backs Italy's 'bold measures' to fight virus

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The EU on Tuesday praised Italy for taking "bold" steps to curb the spread of the new coronavirus outbreak, adding that Brussels would do all in its power to help.

"We commend the Italian authorities for the very courageous measures they are taking," said Valdis Dombrovskis, the European Commission's executive vice president.

"We know that they will put a great strain on the Italian people, but it's better to take those bold measures now to protect as many people as possible from the virus," he said.

The [coronavirus](#) outbreak has killed 463 people in Italy and forced the government to restrict movement for its 60 million citizens.

Dombrovskis is the EU executive's most senior economic official and all eyes will be on the tolerance in Brussels for big spending by Italy to face the [economic shock](#) caused by the outbreak.

Italy, the eurozone's third biggest [economy](#), is heavily indebted and often in violation of EU limits on public spending; its fragile banks are seen as a particular danger for the wider economy.

The government aired plans on Tuesday to allow families to suspend mortgage and some tax payments to help them deal with the crisis.

Ministers said they would also ask the EU to allow Rome to raise its deficit spending beyond the 7.5 billion euros (\$8.5 billion) allowed to help businesses hurt by the sudden downturn, with tourism especially hit.

"We will support Italy and its people by any means and measures at our disposal," Dombrovskis, a former Latvian prime minister, said.

While nothing has been decided, he hinted that a European response on the economy would focus on helping smaller companies in Italy and across Europe, perhaps with special loans.

"We can withstand the shock. Our economic fundamentals are strong. Our economies will be able to rebound once this shock is absorbed," he said.

Italy on Tuesday imposed [travel restrictions](#) and a ban on public gatherings to help fight the spread of a disease that has infected more than 9,000 people in the Mediterranean country in just over two weeks.

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