

To:

Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission

Thierry Breton, European Commissioner of Internal Market, President of EC Tourism Committee

November 17th, 2020

Subject: A unified approach towards the re-opening of the European travel and tourism market

Dear Vice-President,
Dear Commissioner,

The current COVID-19 pandemic has hit tourism particularly hard as, on the one hand, it has led to a significant reduction of income for millions of people and, on the other hand, it has diminished the willingness to travel for fear of catching the coronavirus or -very often- for fear of being quarantined or stranded at very short notice. As a consequence international tourism activity is expected to diminish by between € 750 B to € 1,000 B (-60% to -80%) this year compared to 2019 (UNWTO), 110 M jobs are at risk (WTTC), and international air travel is not expected to recover to 2019 levels before 2025 (ACI).

Within this very adverse environment, many governments restarted tourism activity this summer to safeguard the livelihoods of millions of people, as well as of whole communities in islands or other isolated areas that are largely or fully dependent on tourism. This opening offered the opportunity to millions of people to travel as they do every year for their personal welfare and to rejoin friends and family.

However, the reopening of the market was very limited, with destinations reporting drops of 70% to 90% in their activity. This is due not only to health concerns and low consumer confidence, but also due to the European Travel and Tourism market remaining heavily segmented while different countries apply different regulations, and travelers risk being stranded or quarantined at very short notice. The problem is exacerbated as the communication system from all sides is not transparent, leading to a confusion of potential customers. It is, therefore, imperative that a 'COVID-normal' is established with uniform / standardized protocols and regulations (at least) across Europe, so as to avoid unilateral actions by member countries. A unified approach, which includes a coordinated approach on travel advices, testing systems, and medical facilities, and is communicated in a coherent way in all EU countries, will be pivotal to restore confidence in travel and tourism both during traveling and while at the destination.

Further, as representatives of the hard-hit tourism sectors of our countries it is in despair and with dismay that we observe several governments and political parties trying to make a scapegoat of holiday and travel for the second wave of the pandemic currently developing in Europe, although there is no evidence that tourists are a major source of infections; on the contrary there is plenty of evidence that tourism flows were largely managed in a secure way without an adverse health impact. Should this effort succeed, the effects will be catastrophic not only from an economic and social perspective but

also on the European way of living, of which travel is an essential component and facilitates a better understanding among the peoples of different nations.

On the contrary, we believe that tourism businesses and workforce should be supported during the pandemic so that they are operational when tourism activity starts to recover – which it will undoubtedly do once health concerns are addressed through a vaccine or a medicine.

The intervening period until then should be exploited by the EU and national governments by funding programmes that will:

- reskill and upskill the tourism workforce;
- improve the digitalisation of the sector and safeguard it from the increasing monopoly power of the giants of the IT industry, which are primarily non-European;
- further improve the sustainability of the businesses and the destinations to meet the developing demands of tourists, for which the pandemic acted as a catalyst.

We remain at your disposal to discuss how to work towards the objectives of reopening the European travel and tourism market and working towards a stronger industry in the medium and long term.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Michael Frenzel

President, Bundesverband der Deutschen Tourismuswirtschaft, Federal Association of the German Tourism Industry (BTW)

Gianfranco Battisti

President, Federturismo Confindustria, Italian Federation of Travel and Tourism Industries

Yiannis Retsos

President, Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE)

Thomas Reinsborg

President, Norsk Reiseliv - Norwegian Tourism Partners