



11 May 2020
Brussels

Dear President Ursula von der Leyen,
Dear President Charles Michel,
Dear Prime-Minister Andrej Plenković,

Europe is in the midst of the greatest crisis since the end of WWII. We are facing a health crisis that has already severely affected the European economy with the European Commission now predicting the most dramatic decline of the EU's GDP since the foundation of the ESCS.

While almost all sectors are affected in a way most of us would not have deemed possible two months ago, the tourism and travel sector has virtually come to a standstill. European airlines are operating at around 10% of their usual capacity - and this is only due to the fact that air freight transport has slightly increased during the crisis. Passenger transport has nearly stopped entirely. Due to the far-reaching closure of intra- and extra EU-borders and due to the travel warnings issued by almost all member states, touristic activity has come to a halt all over Europe.

This has brought many companies to the brink of financial and economic collapse. It has left millions of passengers and consumers in uncertainty whether they will be able to claim their money back, or when and whether they will be able to go on holiday or visit their friends and family again. Workers, of whom many already were in a vulnerable position due to the seasonal nature of the tourism industry, have lost their jobs with no foreseeable means of income.

We therefore believe it is of utmost importance that the EU as a whole is going to act swiftly on the matter. We need to safeguard an industry and jobs provided by an industry that is in many ways the backbone of the EU's economy.

The S&D-Group has clear priorities when it comes to an acute and post-COVID-19 strategy for the tourism and travel sector. We need immediate financial support for the sector, a separate budget line in the new MFF, proper enforcement of occupational safety and health standards; and as tourism industry is vulnerable a Crisis Management Mechanism for the future.

We call on the European Commission and member states to adopt immediate measures, namely to create a European Travel Guarantee Fund to secure the financial liquidity of the aviation and tourism sector, whilst at the same time ensuring that workers who have lost their job are supported and proper social dialogue can take place despite the crisis. We need to help to safeguard consumer-rights, in particular safeguarding and informing consumers of the right to refund for cancelled travel, including package travel, and make voluntary vouchers a more attractive option for passengers and consumers.

We further call on the European Commission to adopt immediate guidelines in the form of a European Tourism Certification in order to enable the tourism sector to go back to business as soon as possible and enable Europeans to go on vacation. Some of the hardest hit countries in the European Union are the EU's prime holiday destinations. In revitalising the sector, we would make an invaluable contribution to their swift recovery.

We encourage the Commission to continue building the network of professional tourism stakeholders, especially with the UNWTO, with whom the European Parliament and the European Commission signed Memorandum of Understanding.

Finally, we call the European Commission to organise a European Communication Campaign for Tourism after the crisis, aiming at re-establishing consumers trust in the sector and informing them about their rights. Trust is the most important value that needs to be rebuilt towards the consumers and towards the tourism industry.

Best wishes,



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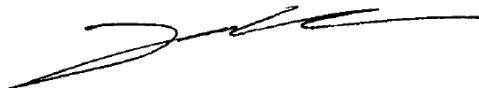
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