

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Covid-19: Tourism Ministers and the Commission need to step up efforts for travel and tourism**

**Ahead of the informal meeting of the Tourism Ministers next week, ECTAA calls on the European leaders to come up with a more substantial rescue package, a coordinated covid-19 exit strategy and ambitious recovery plan for travel and tourism.**

**Brussels. 24 April 2020.** The travel bans and closing of borders imposed to help contain the covid-19 spread has brought travel and tourism to a halt. Tourism hotspots are deserted, hotels and restaurants hauntingly empty, aircrafts parked on runways. The activity of a whole industry is suspended, with devastating impact for businesses, most of which are SMEs and family-run enterprises.

Tourism Ministers are meeting next Monday for an informal Council meeting. It is time for them, according to the European travel agents and tour operators association, to take coordinated action, as 80% of tourist arrivals in Europe are from intra-EU source markets.

Travel and tourism is the most affected sector, being the first to be hit and one of the last one to get out of the Covid-19 crisis with the phased lifting of travel restrictions. The road ahead is long and hard and financial support measures are key for the survival of the industry. But so far, they are few and aid has not yet reached the enterprises. "We need more financial commitment from Member States to this important industry, which contributes more than 10% of EU GDP and provides 12 million jobs" said Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA.

ECTAA strongly believe that is it time for the Commission and the Member States to set up in addition an ambitious recovery plan for the industry. Tourism must be firmly anchored in the Marshall recovery plan announced by Commission President von der Leyen. Tourism Ministers should cooperate and coordinate with the European Commission to see how such recovery plan is best implemented at national level to allow the sector to lift off again and help the transition to a more sustainable, digital and innovative tourism".

"But this should not prevent Tourism Ministers to raise the issue of vouchers to the Commission", added Pawel Niewiadomski. "While travel companies would like to refund their customers, there is no more cash in the system. A pragmatic solution helping travel companies to overcome the liquidity crisis without trading off consumer protection is needed". ECTAA and many other stakeholders call for a temporary derogation from European legislations to offer vouchers in lieu of refunds, that are flexible, refundable at end of term and are guaranteed against the insolvency of the travel company.

While the industry commits to guarantee the consumers that they will be able to travel as soon travel restrictions are lifted, ECTAA calls on European leaders to adopt a common approach as

regards the gradual lifting of the lock-down and conditions to restart travel and tourism. Industry could develop common guidelines on such issues as respect for social-distancing and hygiene rules, but different rules imposed in different countries must be avoided.

Pawel Niewiadomski, concluded "We are in an unprecedented crisis. We need to think out of the box. We need actions and we need them now. Otherwise many tourism actors will disappear and European tourism will contract. Nobody stands to win anything from this."

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Note the editors:

ECTAA regroups the national associations of travel agents and tour operators of 29 European countries and represents some 80.000 enterprises.

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