

## **The European travel agents and tour operators call for pragmatism and flexible application of the refund rules**

***Covid-19 has brought travel and tourism to a standstill. Travel agents and tour operators call on the European Commission to allow a more flexible application of the European rules on package travel.***

Brussels. 17 March 2020. Each day the Covid-19 outbreak is further slowing down the European economy. The unavoidable decisions to contain the corona pandemic are severely restricting public life and bringing travel and tourism to an almost complete standstill. Considering that this is a crisis of yet unforeseen dimension since the beginning of the European integration, the European travel agents and tour operators community calls on the European Commission to continue giving a strong signal to the European travel industry.

A rapid solution needs to be found to the massive cancellations of travel as result of negative travel advisories and closing of borders. The cancellation of trips is currently causing an exorbitant outflow of liquidity, which could lead to the insolvency of thousands of travel companies (tour operators and travel agencies) in the very near future.

Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA, said "Governments and the industry are working together to find practical solutions for both costumers and the travel companies, such as providing customers with a voucher for travel after the crisis instead of refunds. We need the European Commission to grant this exceptional flexibility in the application of the Directive 2015/2302 on package travel and linked travel arrangements. This is in the interest of all of us: costumers, travel companies, suppliers and governments". He added "Customers have nothing to gain, if travel companies are bankrupt and there is no money to provide refunds."

Moreover, ECTAA calls on the Commission to enable and invite Member State to use the possibilities provided by art 107(3)b) TFUE as a matter of urgency to financially support tour operators, travel agents as well as the entire travel value chain (transport, accommodation services and other services providers).

As in New Zealand, European governments should already consider injecting a significant share of the GDP into a spending package in an attempt to fight the effects of Covid-19 on the economy. It is essential to bring ambitious strong positive signals to help the economy to anticipate the recovery.

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ECTAA regroups the national associations of travel agents and tour operators of 30 European countries, of which 26 are within the European Union, and represents some 70.000 enterprises. It also has four International Members from Israel, Malaysia, Morocco and Tunisia.

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