



NETWORK FOR THE EUROPEAN PRIVATE SECTOR IN TOURISM

To:

Commissioner Breton, responsible for Internal Market

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CC:

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NET letter to Commissioner Breton – Proposals for Exit Plan

As COVID-19 continues deflagrating around the world, the private tourism and travel sector is facing unprecedented challenges, with businesses closed or without clients, thousands of jobs being lost, and consumers not feeling confident enough to enjoy the touristic offer.

Within this context, we would like to thank you one more time for giving NET the opportunity to be present at the video-conference meeting you have organised on 22 April 2020. We believe that a continuous dialogue with the industry is the way forward to find common solutions and work on an exit plan and progressive recovery.

In this sense, NET would like to share with you some thoughts and proposals for the way forward.

Harmonisation of rules

- NET welcomes the EU effort to provide harmonised guidance for the restart of tourism in Europe in terms of the tourism sector itself but also with regards to transport, health and safety and border opening;
- In the same spirit, the EU must make an effort to ensure to the highest degree possible the harmonisation of Member States' protocols with regards to health and safety provisions in touristic venues, accommodation and means of transportation, as well as access to entry points (air, sea and land) and eventually the city destinations themselves.

Financing

- Tourism businesses continue facing huge **liquidity problems**, especially SME's and micro-enterprises. Short-term measures are needed. NET recommends the Commission to issue **guidelines** explaining Member States the existing possibilities of financial support covered by EU funding and share best practices of state aid that works quickly and efficiently for travel and tourism businesses. The objective is that governments are

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reassured that if they advance the financial support now in their respective countries, they will be financially supported in the future;

- NET very much welcomes structural funds. But this type of financing takes quite a long time to deploy. Companies need fast track procedures in place;
- NET strongly supports the creation of a specific budget line for tourism. The aim should be to help industry offer quality and sustainable products and services; to develop a skilled work force; to help companies access and use aggregate tourism data to be able to provide a more attractive offer;
- It will take a long time for customer's travel confidence to come back again. This means that financial support should be prolonged in time for the tourism sector;
- Overall, NET would like to know more details about the financing plans that will be proposed by the Commission to overcome the crisis. A Marshall plan was mentioned, where c.20% of the funding would be attributed to tourism. NET welcomes such a plan and would like to be consulted on the topic and help build the plan for the tourism sector including a scheme for easy access to funds for investments either lost in 2020 or planned for at least the next five years.

Vouchers

- Given the liquidity shortages, NET would like to recall its position on vouchers: all travel and tourism service providers should have the possibility to offer flexible, refundable and insolvency protected vouchers for customers for cancelled services due to the closure of borders and/or lock-down measures adopted by Member States.
- In cases where there is no relevant EU legislation addressing tourism service cancellations, in particular for accommodation and other pre-paid tourism services made via large accommodation booking platforms, we would nonetheless welcome a positive message from the European Commission towards the EU Member States on guidance that enables state-guaranteed vouchers for a later stay instead of a direct refund.

Borders

- An EU coordinated strategy to travel is essential. Business needs to plan and people need to feel safe and should not be faced with different requirements and constraints depending on origin or destination;
- Information on the opening of the internal borders (air, sea, land) should also be easily accessible by everyone – NET suggests that Frontex updates its mapping information as frequently as possible;
- Travellers should be able to access an **European portal** that describes all the services that are open / closed in the different Member States, including limitations to opening or access where they exist (ie. restaurants open but only 50% capacity, limits of persons in a group, etc).
- Despite the European Commission's initiative on green lanes, long waiting times are still an issue in several Member States, with several hours of waiting time at some newly created intra-EU borders. As de-confinement commences, more traffic, including

private cars, will overwhelm these borders, and trucks blocked in these border queues will have an effect on the tourist travel patterns and the functioning of the single market.

- A clear schedule of border opening dates is important. Accommodation services are at risk of losing both international pre-booked visitors that have to cancel last minute and more local but secure requests that they cannot accept due to this blocked capacity. For small services such as holiday homes, this loss can make up to 100% of their revenue.
- A clear schedule of border opening dates is important. Small services are in the risk to lose both international pre-booked visitors that have to cancel last minute, and more local but secure requests that they cannot accept due to this blocked capacity. This loss can make up to 100% of their revenue.

Testing capacity

- NET encourages the implementation of a large-scale testing program: to help keep the number of infections low and allow the economy to recover. Antibody testing on IgM and IgG should be additionally encouraged once available.
- Harmonization of tests is a very delicate matter. NET supports the roll-out of **self-testing kits**, if properly validated and their reliability ensured. This will probably facilitate the traveller's mobility and willingness to move;
- NET advises the Commission to avoid situations where testing is done in the destinations. This can lead to travellers being obliged to face quarantine. It could also lead to contamination to be developed during the transportation. In any case, should a traveller be quarantined, there should be an option for repatriation;
- On the other hand, it is to note that there are countries where tests are very difficult to obtain (only done if someone is severely sick or presents two/three of the symptoms of the virus). Healthy people should not be discouraged to travel;
- In the same spirit, ensuring ample availability and the harmonisation of rules for the use of PPE is of paramount importance for the smooth resumption of operations;
- Drivers of bus and coach should be classed as a priority category, making them eligible for mass immunity testing as a pragmatic measure to facilitate their full movement, including across borders.
- Finally, even if a person finds himself/herself placed in what is considered a "dangerous zone", she/he should be able to travel if he/she is healthy;

Contact tracing

- NET welcomes a framework for contact tracing and warning with the use of mobile apps, which respects data privacy and is interoperable across Europe. These applications helped other countries interrupt infection chains and reduce the risk of further virus transmission.

Digital

- NET considers that digitalisation should be part of the solution. Access to data is a must for tourism services to present an offer that is in line with the client's needs; subsidiarity should prevail in order to support the elaboration of clear policy measures addressing the public interest at destination level; the responsibility of platforms should be clearly defined while ensuring adequate compliance and enforcement. We will be pleased to present the NET position paper on the matter in the days ahead.

Sustainability

- To provide a sustainable touristic offer is one of our main goals. Energy efficiency and the lowering of the carbon footprint are objectives to achieve. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, a specific budget to help our companies become more environmentally friendly is clearly needed.
- Collective passenger transport should also be prioritised versus the use of private passenger cars as the most efficient way for decarbonisation and decongestion of road transport.

Marketing

- NET encourages the idea of developing joint promotion solution for Europe and to organize B2B networking events, however, it should draw a limited amount of funds from the MFF budget line for tourism. The vast majority should be allocated as indicated above for the sustainable development of the business and improvement of the services offered.

Our willingness to deliver the best possible tourism services continues driving us forward. We count with the European Commission's support in helping us reach this goal, by ensuring a safe EU tourism environment.

Signed on behalf of the NET group by

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