

Joint Note of Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Malta, Slovakia and Spain

On the Rapid Restoration of Free Mobility

Honorable Commissioner Breton,
Honorable Commissioner Kyriakides,
Esteemed Presidency,

We, the Ministers responsible for Tourism of Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Malta, Slovakia and Spain would like to stress once again the unprecedented impact the COVID-19 crisis continues to have on our economies and societies and in particular on the tourism ecosystem and international mobility. Recent figures by the UNWTO show a decline in international arrivals in Europe of -70% in 2020 and that EU overnight stays fell by 49% between January and September 2020, with the outlook for the near future remaining bleak.

In accordance with the Statement of the Members of the European Council from 25/26 February 2021, we acknowledge that the epidemiological situation remains serious and that the new variants pose additional challenges. The protection of public health is imperative for both the EU and its Member States. We therefore recognize that for the time being, non-essential travel is restricted. However, such drastic measures should not go beyond what is strictly necessary to safeguard public health.

In light of increasing vaccination numbers and testing capacities, we welcome the discussions on the creation of vaccination certificates, test result certificates and other instruments at EU level. The increasing number of bilateral initiatives, by individual Member States, related to freedom of mobility illustrates the emerging need for viable solutions. Moreover, impatience is growing amongst citizens and businesses to quickly implement solutions that facilitate mobility while providing a maximum level of epidemiological and data security. Increased efforts to ensure better coordination and communication of travel-related measures at EU level are thus indispensable to further improve free movement of persons and goods within the European Union. We believe the time is now to at least set conditions under which non-essential travelling, in particular for tourism, can be resumed.

The rapid creation of digital tools will be key. We support the decision of the European Council from 25/26 February 2021 to develop an interoperable health information tool that should include all the necessary COVID-19 related information such as on vaccination certificates, test results and on a possible recent recovery from a COVID-19 infection. Such a digital health information tool (e.g.: "health passport") should facilitate safe travel and will thus be an important boost to support the relaunch of safe travelling.

As a European Union that strives to be a front-runner in the digital age, we support the Presidency and urge the Commission to accelerate the development of such a digital

1st March 2021

interoperable health information tool to facilitate mobility. We encourage the Presidency to liaise with the Member States to rapidly find a common and coordinated solution.

Moreover, we continue to support efforts and coordinated measures that aim at restoring the full operation of the EU's transportation network in order to address the challenges faced by all Member States, in particular islands and regions on the periphery of the EU, whilst also addressing the EU citizen's confidence in the safety of travelling and free movement as well as providing the tourism sector with planning security.

We, the undersigned Ministers for Tourism, stress the importance of returning to cross-border mobility for the restart of tourism, for the survival and recovery of its mainly small and medium-sized enterprises providing millions of jobs, and for reinvigorating regional value chains.

We are convinced that a sustainable solution requires a rapid, united and coordinated approach in order to avoid a fragmented Single Market.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Köstinger, Minister of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, Austria

Mariyana Nikolova, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Demographic Policy and Minister of Tourism, Bulgaria

Harry Theoharis, Minister of Tourism, Greece

Clayton Bartolo, Minister for Tourism and Consumer Protection, Malta

Andrej Doležal, Minister of Transport and Construction, Slovakia

Reyes Maroto, Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Spain