

Extraordinary Informal VTC EU Ministerial Tourism Meeting March - 1st 2021

INFORMAL SUMMARY

On Monday 1st of March, took place an Extraordinary Informal VTC of the EU Ministers for Tourism.

Chaired by the Minister Pedro Siza Vieira and Secretary of State Rita Marques, the Ministers were invited by the Presidency to make stock of the challenges of the pandemic impact in the tourism sector and how the EU can enhance the economic and employment recovery and new policy and tools can be EU implemented in the short term.

All the EU Ministers identified the long impact on the Tourism economic activity that the EU should be addressed by the EU. This sector has been one of the most heavily impacted sectors by the pandemic, and the way it recovers will impact the macroeconomic recovery in many countries, and in Europe as a whole.

Tourism weighs heavily on employment, GDP and exports. With this pandemic and consequent restrictive measures all these indicators suffered significant drops. The longer the crisis persists, the more businesses and jobs will be lost, the tougher it will be to rebuild the tourism sector.

Ministers emphasized the EU need to improve free movement of persons within the European Union. The importance of returning to cross-border mobility is crucial for the restart of tourism, for the survival and recovery of its mainly small and medium-sized (SME) enterprises providing millions of jobs and for reinvigorating regional value chains.

At the same time, it was underlined that quick, united and coordinated approach should be taken in order to avoid a fragmented Single Market.

Since more people are immunized across the EU and there has been an increase in testing across the countries, Ministers identified that vaccination certificates should be regarded as a complement to other means of control, such as COVID tests or immunity tests, to ease mobility between EU Member States.

There was a general call for increased cooperation and coordination on vaccination certificates, test result certificates and other instruments at EU level (non-discrimination in applying rules), in order to ensure the implementation of common and harmonized travel principles, protocols and documents, as well as technological systems to support that DATA.

Also stated the need to find a common and coordinated solution such as the development of an interoperable and digital information tool or mechanism (digital platform) that will gather health information from passengers in order to reactivate mobility and to boost and support the relaunch of safe travelling. This should aggregate information such as vaccination certificates, commonly accepted test, recent recovery from a COVID-19 infection, etc. The creation of digital tools can even be based on already existing work done on this issue by many Member States with their digital platforms or travel passes (European Council from 25/26 February 2021).

The European Commission announced that it will present a legislative proposal during March for a “Digital Green Pass” that will concentrate info like proof of vaccination; results on tests and info on Covid19 recovery. This platform will ensure respect for data protection, security and privacy. The Ministers recommended that platforms from Member States or other solutions that have been developed should be considered as a basis for quick implementation.

The financial support measures approved in accordance with the Temporary Framework on state aid has been a lifeline for tourism enterprises. Although various forms of temporary or permanent interventions have been very important to the tourism sector, other measures could be envisaged.

Financial Support is deemed crucial not only to save the sector from collapse, but also to promote a far-reaching modernization of the tourism sector, to ensure Europe’s leading position in tourism worldwide in the years to come.

At the medium and long term, it was stressed the opportunity for the EU to exchange good practices and reinforce its cooperation and coordination in the framework of a common approach to the Tourism sector 2030/2050 underpinned by shared priorities and an action plan, to drive the green and digital transition of the tourism ecosystem and strengthen its competitiveness, resilience and sustainability. Some Ministers and Commissioner Breton underlined the need to develop a European Strategy for the sector – EU2030 / 2050 Agenda.