

CLOSE THE BORDERS? TOURISM EXPERTS SAY NO



The travel industry professionals believe that terrorism has become their greatest threat since most attacks that have shaken the world in recent months have had the same target: tourism and tourists. When the countries decide to close the borders, the impact on the sector will be immense.

Beaches in Tunisia and the Ivory Coast, a Metrojet plane from Sharm el- Sheikh to St. Petersburg, the Brussels airport, downtown Istanbul, trendy bars, a concert hall and a stadium during an international match in Paris, a high-speed train between the Netherlands and France, the Bardo National Museum, one of the major museums in the world....

"The world is a more volatile place than it was a year ago and that is definitely affecting our business," said Gerald Lawless, chairman of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). He believes though that to close the borders is not the right answer to the current security problems.

WTTC called on world governments to avoid overreaction. Tourism professionals agree that terrorism represents a great threat to this massive industry which in 2015, according to the WTTC, contributed \$7.2 trillion to global GDP (around 10%) and which, directly or indirectly, accounts for one in every 11 job positions on the planet.

While tourism grew by 2.8% last year (more than the 2.3% growth in the global economy), the industry experts point out that terrorism cost lots of money - it affected countries like Turkey, bookings for this summer are down 32%, while Air France-KLM estimated a 120 million euros drop in income in the first quarter of 2016 following the attacks in Paris in November.

Arne Sorenson, president of the Marriott hotel chain, pointed out that the sector "is facing the greatest global threat in its history". The main concern is not only tourists staying home. It is the time it takes to a country or a city to fully recover from a terrorist attack - on average it takes 13 months.

Moreover, in many cases, tourists change beaches, but do not stop travelling. This is what happened in Spain, which has seen increased bookings, especially in the Canary Islands, following the attacks in Tunisia and Egypt, countries whose economies have been severely weakened by the lack of tourists. **Last summer tourism grew 3.7% in Spain, the best figure in the last decade.**

However, the fact that the attacks in both Paris and Brussels have shown that the terrorists are able to move relatively freely between the ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq and Europe is bringing about a change in the rules governing borders. And it may get worse, affecting especially new global players such as China, on which the future of the sector depends.

Possible overreaction of governments and their decision to close the borders might be more harmful to tourism than the very decisions by the consumers. In fact, the figures indicate that, in spite of Al Qaeda and ISIS, people are travelling more and more. In 1960 there were 25 million tourist trips around the world, 250 million in 1970, 536 million in 1995, 922 million in 2008, one billion in 2014,

and 1.2 billion last year.

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