

# EUROPEAN STATES ARE CAUTIOUS ABOUT REOPENING BORDERS



The European tourism ministers agreed to reopen their borders on the basis of bilateral agreements between countries with the same epidemiological data. However, the 27 ministers were unable to agree on the roadmap proposed by the Commission for a revival of tourism. The several States have started to take own yet isolated measures.

The slowing down of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe, where the virus already killed more than 170,000 people, has led to a debate on reopening borders and reviving tourism, a sector that has been badly affected by the crisis. **For the time being, the recovery is taking place in a disordered manner, while the EU recommends great caution.**

European tourism ministers last week discussed via videoconference the European Commission's roadmap on the gradual reopening of borders to save tourism while maintaining a high level of security.

The 27 ministers were unable to agree on the entire plan proposed by the EU executive. "Further discussions will be needed on how to implement the tourism package," summed up Gari Capelli, the Minister of Tourism of Croatia, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the EU.

"We cannot take undue risks, a month ago the whole of Europe was confined," he adds, "we consider reopening borders responsibly by concluding bilateral agreements. We will do more in a month or two."

## **Bilateral Agreements**

The European States should, therefore, conclude bilateral agreements on the reopening of borders between countries with similar epidemiological data.

"We have not adopted a single decision on travelers' arrivals," says Gari Capelli, "it will all depend on the epidemiological situation in the different countries. Bilateral agreements may be initiated between two countries with similar situations". A European state with more deaths and infected people would only be able to benefit from this measure "a little later", he explained.

Tourism ministers welcomed the Commission's proposal to create an interactive map that citizens will be able to consult in order to check the situation in real-time.

Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton is expected to present on 27 May a package of financial measures to support the tourism sector in the most affected countries.

## **Reopening Borders in Disordered Manner**

For the time being, the decisions to reopen the internal borders of the Schengen area are being taken in a disordered manner. Several European states have already taken steps to attract tourists again.

Italy, badly hit by the pandemic, announced a reopening of its borders and airports on 3 June.

Greece, spared by the virus thanks to strict measures, presented a plan to revive tourism with a gradual resumption of flights to its territory from 1 July. Hotels and restaurants will reopen from 15 June. Also, VAT on ferries, flights, buses and soft drinks will be reduced from 24% to 13%.

Slovenia has decided to distribute a cheque of €200 to each of its citizens to be spent in hotels and restaurants.

At the ministerial meeting, France called for better coordination among the European states. The objective for Paris is the reopening of the EU's internal borders "from 15 June".

**"We must work with the border countries, among Europeans, to avoid having a multi-speed Europe"**, said the French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Jean-Baptiste Lemoigne to the local media.

Also, Germany brought together eleven countries from the south of the EU in an attempt to coordinate the reopening of borders.

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