

BETTER COORDINATION: EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO END THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS CHAOS



Common criteria for defining risk areas, three-color mapping, better information: the European Commission wants to clear up the confusion of traffic restrictions in Europe.

The European executive is stepping up to the plate and has just presented a proposal for a recommendation to coordinate the cacophonous measures taken by European Union countries after the vacations. It is still to be debated but the idea is clear: **to further harmonize the travel restrictions to give more coherence to the decisions taken by European countries.** For the time being, each country is applying the measures it regards necessary.

In France, for example, no restrictions are imposed on travelers from other EU countries, while Hungary, on the other hand, closed its borders to non-residents until the end of September with exceptions for tourists from the Visegrad Group countries (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland), for which it received a warning letter from the Commission.

Other countries impose testing or quarantine, sometimes both, on travelers coming from areas deemed to be at risk. This patchwork, with changes in instructions sometimes announced without notice, "causes confusion for citizens", stressed the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in a video message. "We must ensure greater clarity and predictability," she advocated.

While countries apply different criteria for imposing travel restrictions to an area, the EU executive proposes that any classification should be based on three considerations: the number of new cases of Covid-19 per 100,000 inhabitants reported over 14 days, the percentage of positive tests among all tests over seven days, and the number of tests performed per 100,000 inhabitants over seven days.

The Commission also proposes that the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) publishes a weekly map of the European area, classifying the zones using three colors (green, orange, red) based on certain thresholds and that the data be provided at the regional level.

The red zones would be those where the number of new cases of Covid-19 is greater than 50 per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days and the percentage of positive tests equal or greater than 3%, or where the total number of Covid-19 cases is greater than 150 per 100,000 people over 14 days.

Areas where information is lacking or where the number of tests is considered insufficient would be "grey". For these areas, the restrictions could be mandatory.

Finally, in order to avoid travelers and businesses being caught off guard by unexpected changes of instructions, **the Commission proposes that Member States communicate to the Commission and other countries every Thursday the forthcoming restrictions or lifting of restrictions** and that these come into force the following Monday.

"We believe that no citizen of the Union should be refused entry to another European country," said Ursula von der Leyen. Will she be heard?

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