

The travel industry calls for coordinated and proportionate measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak

Brussels 2 March 2020. In the context of the rapid spread of the new COVID-19 and uncoordinated communication from different sources, travel agents and tour operators in the European Union call for introduction of proportionate and evidence-based measures to protect the health of travellers and tourism sector employees in order to control the spread of the virus.

The tourism sector has always been committed to putting the health and safety of its customers and employees first. However, the unexpected cancellation on Friday, February 28th, of the 2020 edition of ITB, the world's largest tourism trade fair just days before its opening, had a strong impact on the thousands of travel professionals from 180 countries that were preparing to meet in Berlin this week.

Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA, the European association of travel agents and tour operators, said "it is essential, in this difficult moment, to support the international and European scientific institutions to work closely with all those communities and countries affected by the current health emergency. But it is equally important to bear in mind that travel restrictions going beyond what's required to control the spread of the virus may cause unnecessary reductions of international travel."

The "raison d'être" of the travel agents and the tour operators is to facilitate business, pleasure and leisure activities away from the home environment. The COVID-19 is having, and will have, a devastating impact on tourism in general and on the travel industry in particular.

Pawel Niewiadomski added "consumers are in the middle of booking their summer holidays, but many of them may decide to wait for more clarity before making their choice, which poses additional problems for travel industry players. Customers can rely on professional travel companies for advice and reliable information. As travel agents and tour operators, our focus is and has always been, on taking care of our customers, and we know that we can be an active part in ensuring that their travel expectations for the coming months and years come true, despite temporary adverse travel conditions in some parts of the world".

Considering the global scale of the issue, the unpredictable expansion of the COVID 19-virus and the volume of intra-European travel, ECTAA calls on authorities at all levels to cooperate with each other as well as with the tourism industry to minimize the damages on travel and tourism as much as possible.

ECTAA will of course continue working with all the stakeholders of the travel industry, but is at the same time calling upon the European Commission to set-up an official working group with the travel industry on COVID-19 issues bringing together experts in different fields including national health authorities and the WHO to adopt a holistic approach of the issue, anticipate the next developments, consider relief measures for the most impacted tourism enterprises and prepare the conditions for a quick recovery.

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ECTAA regroups the national associations of travel agents and tour operators of 30 European countries, of which 27 are within the European Union, and represents some 70.000 enterprises. It also has four International Members from Israel, Malaysia, Morocco and Tunisia.

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