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Speech by Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager on the Tourism and Transport Package

Brussels, 13 May 2020

This has been a long and difficult spring. Key workers in healthcare, and other vital services, have worked selflessly to keep us safe. And we've all had to make changes in the way we live our lives, to help contain the spread of coronavirus. But we're slowly starting to emerge into a life beyond lockdown – though not yet a life beyond coronavirus. Our thoughts are now turning to the summer and even further, and to the places we love to travel – by the sea, in the mountains, in our cities and our countryside.

And those places are keen to welcome travellers back. Tourism is a vital part of Europe's economy – nearly a tenth of GDP across Europe, and more than 10% in 11 Member States. Millions of jobs depend on it – often in areas where there aren't many other industries. And tourism gives those regions and workers security and hope.

But we have to reintroduce it safely. So this is the first fundamental principle that underlies our guidance. That means taking gradual, careful steps to help travel restart, in line with what the science tells us.

The second principle of our guidance is avoiding discrimination. Different countries, of course, are in different situations. But we need to treat Europeans equally

And we all share that responsibility – governments and businesses, workers and travellers. Most important thing we can do is to be open about what we know and what we don't know. That is the only way for travellers and business owners to take informed decisions. And obviously no one should travel if they feel sick or have symptoms.

We have to work together, to keep travel safe as Europeans start to cross borders again. That's why the European Commission has adopted a package of guidance and recommendations today, to coordinate a safe return to travel and tourism this summer.

This package is built on the Joint European Roadmap towards lifting containment. It's about coordinating, not replacing, the work that's being done by businesses and by national and local governments in Europe.

We've seen all kinds of innovative ideas to help tourism recover – like the phone numbers and websites in Greece, Germany or Austria that inform tourist businesses about ways to operate safely; or the projects in Lithuania and Slovakia that allow customers to buy vouchers to support their favourite pubs and restaurants. There are bound to be more good ideas to come. So our guidance doesn't try to prescribe exactly what governments and businesses should do. Instead, it's about coordinating the steps that are taken throughout Europe, so that tourists and workers can be confident that they're safe.

There are four vital areas that our guidance addresses, to enable tourism in a safe way this summer. Borders, travel, health and vouchers.

First, we need to carefully reopen borders within Europe. So we've adopted guidance for Member States on a gradual, coordinated lifting of restrictions on free movement in Europe.

Second, people need to be able to travel between European countries. So we're giving guidance on how to gradually reopen transport links – without risking the health of travellers or transport workers.

Third, travellers and workers need to know that the places that tourists visit are safe. Hotels and restaurants, beaches and other tourist sites need to run in a way that minimises the risk of passing on the coronavirus. So with the help of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, we've put together health and safety guidance, with concrete examples, that explains how to operate these services safely.

And finally, we won't get far on our travels if businesses like hotels and airlines have gone out of business. And yet a lot of these businesses are feeling intense strain. They're caught between the need

to refund cancelled trips, and the reality that new bookings are still thin on the ground.

The starting point here is that EU consumers have a right to a cash refund, if that's what they want. But many companies will come under pressure and this liquidity crunch would be less severe if customers accepted vouchers, instead of cash refunds. So today, we adopted a recommendation on how to make these vouchers more attractive.

At the same time many companies are in a situation where liquidity is tight. And governments have stepped in to help companies, also in the tourism industry, to help them mitigate the crisis. This is why, on 19 March, we adopted a temporary framework for state aid, which allows EU Member States to provide liquidity support, very quickly and simply.

Today's guidance can give a chance of a better season for the many Europeans whose livelihoods depend on tourism. And for those who would like to travel this summer.

But that will only work if we all do our part.

In the last few weeks, we've all got used to the idea that the health of our whole community depends on our responsible choices. But also that there are different and justified recommendations in Member States that we should respect. For instance on whether and where to use face masks or how many meters is considered as safe distance between travellers or guests in restaurants. And as we begin to travel again, we need to keep that in mind.

To do that, we need information. This is why the Commission is coordinating work with Member States, to make sure that voluntary contact-tracing apps work well, respect our privacy – and that they work across Europe.

The Commission has also decided to set up a website, with an interactive map. So that Europeans can have the confidence to travel, knowing what's happening in the country they're visiting.

Of course, this is not going to be a normal summer, for any of us. But when we all work together and do our part, in the ways that the Commission is setting out today, we don't have to face a summer stuck at home – or a completely lost season for Europe's tourist industry.

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