

Brussels, 12 June 2020

Open letter to EU Transport and Home Affairs Ministers on lifting of border restrictions

Dear Ministers,

In this crucial period, Airlines for Europe (A4E) would like to express its concerns regarding the full restoration of Schengen and the gradual reopening of the EU's external borders.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, EU Member States had to take unprecedented measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Those measures resulted in the closing of both internal and external borders, generating an almost complete shut down of air travel the last three months. As the health situation in Europe and beyond is gradually and continuously improving, it is now urgent to move forward and effectively restore freedom of movement, a pillar of the European Union.

On 11 June, the European Commission recommended Member States to lift all intra-Schengen border controls as of 15 June. In its [Communication](#), the Commission also set out the objective of achieving a fully-functioning Schengen area by the end of June, followed by a gradual lifting of travel restrictions for the EU's external borders by 1 July.

A4E fully supports these objectives which are of utmost importance to restore connectivity and kickstart tourism for the recovery of European airlines, in light of the upcoming summer season.

However, an effective restoration of air transport is only possible if Member States adopt a coordinated approach with regards to both travel restrictions and necessary health measures. Indeed, the current situation remains contrasted and constitutes an extremely complex challenge for airlines. The lack of alignment of national exit strategies has led to a patchwork of measures (from mandatory COVID-19 tests to quarantines for all international passengers). This fragmented approach is undermining both airlines' attempts to restart their operations and citizens' attempts to plan their vacations.

In addition, the lack of coordination in lifting internal borders could have dramatic effects on the gradual reopening of external borders. Indeed, an uncoordinated approach may put the very integrity of the Schengen area at risk. In this context, A4E

fully supports Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, who indicated that “all internal borders should be open before we start opening the external ones”.

Regarding internal borders, we urge Member States to lift unilateral and unnecessary restrictions to ensure a smooth restoration of the freedom of movement ahead of the summer season. To do so, a coordinated implementation of the EASA-ECDC “[COVID-19 Aviation Health Safety Protocol](#)” will play a vital role.

Regarding external borders, a “gradual and coordinated phasing out of the travel restrictions” as outlined in the Commission’s Communication is necessary. The establishment of common assessment criteria in deciding which third countries’ travel restrictions can be lifted (both to and from) is absolutely crucial, starting from the checklist published by the Commission. In this perspective, the lifting of travel restrictions to low-risk areas is of strategic importance for European airlines in their efforts to restart operations.

In light of the above, we call on Member States to intensify their cooperation to reach a fully functioning Schengen by the end of June and a gradual reopening of external borders by 1 July, as presented by the Commission on 11 June. This cooperation must be based on a constant consultation and information-sharing, both on a bilateral and European level.

After months of a global pandemic that generated terrible social and economic consequences, we are confident that this approach will allow the necessary balance between minimizing the risk of a second COVID-19 outbreak whilst preserving the values our Union is based on.

I remain at your disposal for any further information you may need and look forward to engaging with you on this critical issue.

Yours sincerely,



Thomas Reynaert,

Managing Director, Airlines for Europe