



5.1.2e
Member of the European Commission

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Brussels, 31 March 2020

Dear Minister,

As the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic affects an increasing number of countries around the world, many governments are imposing travel restrictions and closing access to their airports, ports and other points of entry and exit. As a result, an estimated 400 000 EU citizens – and possibly many more – find themselves stranded abroad, unable to return home via commercial means. With health care systems in many countries facing severe strain, the consequences for non-nationals who may find themselves in need of medical assistance are cause for concern. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that we do all we can to bring EU citizens home.

The European Commission is committed to doing all it can to support your efforts. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is cooperating closely with the European External Action Service, European Union Delegations and Member State embassies, as well as with your ministries to organise repatriation flights.

As you know, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) can be activated by EU Member States, the United Kingdom and the six non-EU countries which participate in the Mechanism – namely Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey – to provide assistance in such situations. For repatriation flights requested under UCPM, the EU can co-finance 75% of the transport costs on condition that the request is made in advance of the aircraft's departure and that the requesting country accepts to take on board EU citizens with other nationalities alongside their own nationals.

In the current context, in which all twenty-seven EU Member States, the United Kingdom and the six UCPM Participating States are seeking to repatriate their nationals from abroad, it is essential that the UCPM is reserved for repatriation efforts from countries from which there are no other options available (for instance because commercial aircraft have suspended routes or are banned from landing in a given third country). This is the only way to ensure that the UCPM funds are used in a fair and proportionate way that reflects the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility and accountability on which the Mechanism is based.

To the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the
EU Member States and of UCPM Participating States

In the same vein, every effort should be made to ensure that repatriation flights co-financed under the UCPM carry a significant proportion of nationals of other UCPM Participating States than those of the country requesting the flight. Ideally, this proportion should be as close to 50% as possible.

I am confident that I can count on your cooperation in this matter. For my part, I can assure you that my services will continue to provide any assistance needed to help bring your nationals home.

Yours sincerely,



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C.c.: High Representative/Vice President, Josep Borrell Fontelles