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Brussels,
Ares(2021) 4683038

Dear Minister,

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it unprecedented challenges to the daily lives of our citizens. To protect public health and well-being, Member States have taken exceptional measures affecting core pillars of the European project, most notably freedom of movement within the Union.

As vaccination campaigns accelerate, citizens are justifiably looking forward to the gradual and safe lifting of these restrictions.

The European Union is living up to its citizens' expectations. Together, we are rolling out the EU Digital COVID Certificate¹, which will enter into force on 1 July and allow citizens to prove their vaccination, test or recovery status wherever they go in Europe. Moreover, on 14 June 2021, Member States agreed on a revised Recommendation on travel within the EU², providing for a common approach as to the use of the EU Digital COVID Certificate.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/953 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2021 on a framework for the issuance, verification and acceptance of interoperable COVID-19 vaccination, test and recovery certificates (EU Digital COVID Certificate) to facilitate free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic (OJ L 211, 15.6.2021, p. 1).

² Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/961 of 14 June 2021 amending Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (OJ L 213I, 16.6.2021, p. 1).

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The June European Council underlined that the agreements reached on the EU Digital COVID Certificate and on the revision of the two Council Recommendations on travel within the EU and on non-essential travel into the EU will facilitate safe cross-border travel³.

We are writing to you to ensure a timely and consistent implementation of these two instruments. This will be crucial to facilitate safe free movement, and to give citizens the confidence needed to travel abroad this summer. Citizens also need to be provided with clear and timely information on travel rules and conditions.

On the EU Digital COVID Certificate, we strongly encourage you to progress swiftly with the technical rollout. This will allow us to avoid difficulties when the legislation formally starts to apply on 1 July 2021. As we have mentioned previously, existing possibilities under national law regarding the issuance of COVID-19 certificates could be used to start issuing certificates in the EU Digital COVID Certificate format already before the entry into application of the Regulation. You can count on the continuing support of our experts in this process.

We would also like to draw your attention to the phasing in period foreseen in Article 15 of the EU Digital COVID Certificate Regulation. This period will apply automatically for COVID-19 certificates issued by a Member State before 1 July 2021. However, please note that those Member States that would not, despite their efforts, be in a position to start with the issuance of EU Digital COVID Certificates on 1 July 2021 need to inform the Commission and the other Member States accordingly. In any event, if you do experience issues in the rollout of the system, please do not hesitate to contact our services for support.

At the same time, we need to make best use of the possibilities offered by the EU Digital COVID Certificate. The revised Council Recommendation on travel within the EU provides important clarity as to the conditions for the lifting of restrictions for holders of an EU Digital COVID Certificate.

In particular, Member States agreed on the conditions under which fully vaccinated and recovered persons in the possession of an EU Digital COVID Certificate are to be exempted from travel-related testing and quarantine. At the same time, in view of the need to remain vigilant regarding variants of concern, the Council Recommendation also provides for an 'emergency brake', allowing a Member State to exceptionally and temporarily reintroduce certain measures.

We strongly encourage you to implement the Council Recommendation as soon as possible, notably the exemptions for fully vaccinated and recovered persons, efforts to ensure the unity of travelling families⁴, and the measures to be based on the colours of the map published weekly by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control⁵. This should best be done before 1 July 2021, to ensure

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/24/european-council-conclusions-on-covid-19-and-migration-24-june-2021/>

⁴ Exemptions from quarantine and, for children under the age of 12 years, tests (point 19c of Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1475 as amended).

⁵ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/situation-updates/weekly-maps-coordinated-restriction-free-movement>

that the measures are in place when the EU Digital COVID Certificate starts to apply. Doing so will alleviate many of the obstacles citizens experience today, while ensuring that travel takes place under safe conditions.

Finally, it is vital that travel rules are communicated in a timely, comprehensive and easily accessible fashion. To ensure this, the Commission has made available, and constantly updated, the Re-open EU platform⁶. As an interactive tool available in all official EU languages, it can provide an important service both to citizens and Member States. As more people will want to travel as summer approaches, and restrictions are gradually lifted, we encourage you to ensure that your authorities provide Re-open EU with regular updates on the measures in force. We should do everything to avoid that citizens are provided with incorrect or outdated information. To avoid disruptions, we would also ask your authorities to remain in close contact with the different actors in the travel sector, notably transport operators and transport hubs.

In spite of the foregoing, we must remain fully aware of the challenges we are still facing. ECDC's modelling forecast shows⁷ that, by the end of August, 90% of infections could be due to the more transmissible Delta variant. Until we have ensured that a maximum number of citizens, in particular our most vulnerable, are protected through full vaccination, we need to remain vigilant and re-open gradually to delay the spread of this variant. In addition, we must stand ready to reintroduce public health measures if needed, including by making use of the emergency brake provided for in the Council Recommendations. Coordination is essential, and for this reason it is important that any triggering of the emergency brake be communicated to the Commission and other Member States as soon as possible.

We will continue to work closely with you to address the unique challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the situation evolves, notably in view of further progress on vaccination and of developments regarding variants of concern, we are ready to reinforce our coordinated approach as necessary. With this, we hope that you will be able to find some rest during the coming months – possibly safely travelling in Europe using your EU Digital COVID Certificate.

Yours sincerely,

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⁶ <https://reopen.europa.eu/en>

⁷ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/current-risk-assessment-novel-coronavirus-situation>