



Brussels, 29 April 2020

Mr. Thierry Breton  
Internal Market Commissioner  
EU Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049- Brussels

**Subject: European tourism plan**

Mr Commissioner,

In your speech to the European Parliament on 21 April, you referred to an unprecedented economic and social shock with regard to the situation of tourism in Europe, and you provide several precise figures that make it possible to measure its full extent.

In this context of the global crisis linked to the COVID-19, we fully appreciate your approach and your analysis of the measures to be taken for the professionals mentioned in your speech. In response to this emergency situation, you have developed two aspects: on the one hand, the emergency measures to be taken and, on the other hand, the need to invent the tourism of tomorrow.

It seemed to us essential to draw your attention to the need, within the framework of what you describe as a "Marshall Plan" for tourism, to take into account the situation of the tourism stakeholders who are evolving within the framework of a social and solidarity economy favouring tourism for all. Tourism that identifies itself around the terms: responsible, supportive, fair, sustainable and accessible.

It is within this framework that our association under Belgian law "International Social Tourism Organisation" (ISTO) has been active since its creation in 1963, with 91 members in Europe, established in 10 countries of the Union. These members are often large institutions, be they public, cooperatives, foundations, unions or federations of associations. Even if it is rather difficult to make an exhaustive statistical inventory of the sector, because of the disparity and number of areas in which it operates, it is made up of hundreds of thousands of tourist beds which can accommodate millions of holidaymakers each year and concerns tens of thousands of permanent or seasonal jobs.

In addition, a significant proportion of the sector's facilities are located in unspoilt rural or mountainous geographical areas. This is a particularity that allows a better territorial distribution of the offer, a factor of a development that preserves local balances, both by a sensible use of the sites and by a better respect of the environment.

It is therefore necessary that these many actors should also be able to benefit fully from the urgent support measures that you have mentioned, in particular by giving priority to maintaining a sufficient level of liquidity to meet immediate deadlines and, as a matter of priority, the payment of staff

salaries. Our members are indeed suffering the same disastrous effects of this crisis, with the same risk of cessation of activity with all its economic and social consequences.

However, there is another aspect to be taken into account which could have particularly harmful effects on our democratic European area: leaving a large part of the European population out of the holiday route. Is this really conceivable in the political and social context that we know today in most European countries?

The vast majority of our members are working on a project that facilitates access to holidays for all. This is a notable and indispensable feature of the sector which must be preserved. Since the creation of paid holidays, we have known that holiday time makes it possible, in multiple forms, to promote and participate in the social cohesion of a society, whether national or now European.

This is the case for children with holiday camps and, as such, the cancellation of all discovery school classes not only hits the operators concerned very hard but deprives our young people of educational and playful activities that are particularly useful to their development. This is the case for young people with youth hostels and leisure centres that contribute to the future of their social life. This is the case for senior citizens with specific stays of discovery which provide them with a form of "rebirth". This is the case for all families, especially the most socially fragile, with the play and learning activities offered by holiday villages and vacation clubs. This is also the case for people with disabilities, with adapted reception areas and activities. All these groups represent more than half of the European population!

Very concretely, several of our institutional members have set up programmes aimed at facilitating the departure on holiday of target groups who would otherwise not be able to leave without these measures. This is the case, for example, of the IMSERSO programme in Spain, the INATEL programme in Portugal, government programmes in Belgium, or those of the Agence Nationale du Chèque vacances (ANCV) in France. Unfortunately, we cannot mention them all.

For several years now, our organisation has also been present and very active in several ambitious European tourism projects, such as the one called "Backpacker", aimed at young Europeans, so that through travel and its encounters, they can forge a European identity and culture, promising a common future, based on understanding and tolerance of differences, guaranteeing lasting peace.

I should also like to inform you that on the second theme of your statement, that of inventing a different kind of tourism for tomorrow, our Organisation has for several months now been engaged in important work that has just been completed. It is a five-pronged approach designed to promote "sensible" tourism that is social, supportive, responsible and preserves the environment. We would be very honoured to be able to present it to you. Our Organisation is also a signatory of the "European Tourism Manifesto" and supports the idea of a specific budget line to encourage the development of sustainable tourism. Priority could be given to the development of local intra-European tourism enabling the greatest number of European citizens to enjoy holidays within the Union, whose tourism resources are inexhaustible.

To conclude this letter, I confirm to you that we remain at your disposal to participate, in good understanding with other public or private stakeholders, in the various collective works that you would like to undertake, with the aim of rebuilding tomorrow a European tourism with a promising economic, social and environmental future.

We thank you in advance for the attention you will give to our letter and remain at your service.  
Please accept, Mr European Commissioner, the assurance of our highest consideration.



For the Executive Committee  
Patrick BRAULT  
Vice-President of ISTO