

Open Hearts, Open Minds and Open Borders – The Core of the European Idea

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening virtually on 11-12 June 2021:

Whereas:

- open hearts and open minds are the core of the European idea and open borders are the most practical expression for the daily lives of EU citizens;
- the four freedoms of the European single market – namely the free movement of goods, capital, services and people - are essential to the European Union's ongoing success and prosperity;
- since the outbreak of Covid-19, all four freedoms have been severely challenged, after several EU member states had unilaterally closed borders or set up border controls;
- EU bodies have agreed on a common approach to travel measures in Q4 2020;
- following the emergence of new virus variants, some member states again reacted unilaterally;
- thereby, Europe-wide response from Brussels is increasingly being repudiated by some of its member states and free movement and supply chains are becoming more disrupted and fragmented.

Considering that:

- the European Council agreed on the recommendation "A common approach to travel measures in the EU" in October 2020, with common criteria according to which coordination and cooperation between member states is possible;
- some member states still introduced unilateral measures to prevent cross-border tourism and travel after new Covid-19 variants of concern have emerged;
- specific measures that prevented cross-border tourism and travel were designed disproportionately, as they also affect people who are no longer a risk for infection;
- as vaccination rates steadily increase, generalised border closures become even more disproportionate;
- the lives of EU citizens, especially in the border regions, are closely interconnected economically, socially and culturally;
- border closures thus are a departure from the reality of people's lives;
- in particular, freight transport and cross-border workers, seasonal workers and logisticians have suffered from border controls;

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- free movement has clearly contributed a lot to the GDP of the member states;
- restricting border crossings have led to an almost complete halt of cross-border cooperation that further eroded the European single market.

Believes:

- the four freedoms proved to be an asset with both economic, political and social benefits for the EU;
- by unilaterally imposing restrictions on the free movement without coordinating with the other member states, some member states fuelled resentment and conflicts between neighbours;
- cross-border epidemics, including pandemics, require cross-border responses that could be most effectively and best addressed through coordination between EU bodies and member states as well as other non-member European countries such as EFTA countries and microstates;
- even closed borders could not stop the spread of Covid-19 but instead made cooperation and coordination between member states more difficult.

Calls on EU bodies and member states to:

- immediately reopen and keep borders open between members states that face similar effects of the pandemic, this also includes the suspension of mandatory quarantine requirements;
- give a role of coordination in times of pandemics to the European Commission to ensure a coherence of measures and solidarity between all Member States;
- implement health and security measures such as increased testing that EU bodies and members have already agreed upon;
- cooperate with each other on the basis of the same criteria and official data, especially when the four freedoms are affected;
- close and control borders only at a last resort, respecting European principles such as the four freedoms or the Schengen Border Code;
- acknowledge that unilateral measures must remain exceptional and should at the most be imposed in a proportionate way, locally and for a limited period only. Such measures should be coordinated in advance with neighbouring countries and may under no circumstances lead to permanent border closures and controls;
- acknowledge that restoring freedom of movement is one of the most important prerequisites for the economic recovery of the EU and other countries in the European geographical area and that commuters,

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freight transport, seasonal workers and logisticians were exposed to severe hardship;

- promote European digitalisation by promptly developing and implementing the digital green certificate as an optional mechanism that facilitates the safe free movement of citizens within the EU and in the Schengen area and other countries in the European geographical area, and advocate that all European citizens are allowed to cross internal borders throughout the EU and in the Schengen area again without restrictions on their freedom rights such as travelling, especially when they are vaccinated against, have recovered from or have tested negative for Covid-19;
- promote affordable testing for travel reasons, in order to ensure that every European citizen has equal access to the digital green certificate;
- promote official recognition and technical interoperability between the digital green certificate and the equivalents thereof issued in neighbouring non-EU member states and other partner countries;
- introduce specific exemptions and adaptations of the extraordinary measures for the border regions and to react flexibly to their challenges;
- design border controls and entry restrictions in such a way that they can be removed easily and that negative side effects are avoided as far as possible.

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