



Bundesminister Horst Seehofer
Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat
Berlin, Germany

CC:
Ylva Johansson
Commissioner for Home Affairs
European Commission
Brussels

Brussels, 6 July 2020

Dear Minister Seehofer,

The closure of borders due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on people's lives. In the Schengen area, they jeopardise one of the most tangible achievements of an integrated Europe: the possibility to travel and live together in a common area without internal border controls. While we highly welcome the recent lifting of internal border controls, we are very concerned that travel restrictions at the external borders still divide families and beloved ones. Many bi-national couples, which are not married or whose same-sex marriage certificate is not recognised, did not have a chance to see each other for months.

We receive many heart-breaking emails from such separated couples

- ♥ *Please help. I am an American woman, 35 and my boyfriend, 37 is a German citizen living in Cologne, Germany. We have not seen each other since December.*
- ♥ *Meine Freundin ist US-Amerikanerin. Wir kennen uns jetzt schon etwa 3 Jahre.... Nachdem meine Freundin ihren Job vor kurzem beendet hatte, wollten wir endlich ein gemeinsames Leben in Deutschland beginnen.*
- ♥ *I myself have not seen my fiancé in several months as well, as I am an American citizen. My fiancé and I have already signed a contract for our apartment in Düsseldorf.*
- ♥ *Seit bereits vier Monaten sind mein amerikanischer Partner und ich aufgrund des aktuellen Einreiseverbotes getrennt. Auch wenn es noch nicht auf dem Papier festgehalten ist, sind wir eine Familie.*

We fully support the coordinated approach of the European Commission and the Member States to lift international travel restrictions only gradually and only with countries that have a comparable or better epidemiological situation as the average in the EU+ area. But we call on you in your capacity as Council Presidency to ensure that unmarried couples can hug and kiss each other again. We urge you to ensure that Member States swiftly comply with Commissioner Ylva Johansson's request on twitter yesterday to apply as wide a definition of partnerships as possible. Travelling for love is not tourism.

For countries with higher infection rates, an exemption of the travel ban exists already for families. Yet, it is implemented too restrictive by the Member States. Only couples who are married or whose partnership certificate is acknowledged are allowed to travel. Denmark is the only Member State, which fully applies the EU family definition as defined in Articles 2(2) and 3(2) of Directive 2004/38/EC; it allows also unmarried partners in a stable relationship to travel to their partner, provided that they are tested negatively. We urge you as Council Presidency to ensure that all Member States follow this example.

The pandemic has given many Europeans a hard time. European governments should ease human hardship, wherever possible, without risking a second wave.

Sincerely yours,

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Damian BOESELAGER, MEP Greens/EFA
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