

SAVE THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN BUS BUSINESS!

International petition of bus companies, bus rental brokers, bus business associations and bus tour operators from Europe



Vienna, 23.04.2020

Europe and the entire world are currently experiencing a crisis of historic dimension. The professional sector of bus travel is affected in a particular serious manner – as much as for example the airlines which do currently attract much attention of the media, while we do not. As opposed to the airliners, our sector of activity does not have efficient international structures and lobbying, and therefore is much less visible than others, although equally **many jobs and existences are at stake**. The **City Tours group** of companies, as a leading bus rental broker in Europe, has initiated a continental scale co-operation between bus owners, fellow bus rental brokers, bus tour operators, and professional bus business associations from many different countries in the European Union and beyond. This network is growing each day, but the picture stays the same: **the bus companies need more public attention and help** than they are currently getting. They are in acute danger, and the currently available governmental aids are not enough to make them survive the crisis.

Before this background, and in the name the entire business sector, we declare:

- 1) Public health and safety must of course be in the center of attention. We do support the national and European measures to protect the public from COVID-19.
- 2) We are aware that we carry responsibility towards both our passengers and our drivers. It is self-understanding that we are ready to apply the highest standard of hygienic measures.

However, we do also want to draw the attention of the general public, as well as of the political decision-makers to the following facts:

- A) **Bus travel business was the first economic activity sector which was affected by the virus.** Already in December 2019, customers from Asia started cancelling their planned bus tours in Europe. **And we will be among the last economic activity sectors** that will be allowed to return to “business as usual”, intended as a situation with totally open borders and free international movement in large groups of people who sit close together.
- B) As opposed to other business sectors, bus tour operators and bus companies frequently **needed to pay back down payments** to their customers who had pre-booked services already a long time before the pandemic. We didn’t only lose the “running business”, but we also lost business from the past. And in many cases we also lost down payments which we had made to hotels, restaurants and other service providers, while we didn’t get any cancellation fees from our customers. We got financially crushed between Scylla and Charybdis.
- C) **Public helps** which have been established by many national governments are great, but **don’t solve our problem**. Giving us a state-guaranteed credit which we need to pay back at a later point of time doesn’t really help, since we cannot recover the lost business later. A bus cannot run 60 days per month, even after the end of the crisis.
- D) This **threatens** not only the existence of a few companies, but of our **entire business branch**. A branch which is in large parts consisting of generation-old family-run companies, where it is not only about losing a job, but losing everything we ever worked for and achieved.
- E) We aren’t a “luxury branch” which is not needed, but an essential part of the European economy. We carry millions of foreign tourists – many of them from outside the EU – across the continent, where they spend money in hotels, restaurants, shops, museums, events, fares and congresses. Losing our branch as a whole would have a **domino effect on the national economies of Europe**.

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- F) According to a recent survey among German bus companies, 90% of them can economically **survive** the effects of the lockdown **only for a few more weeks**. In other countries, the situation isn't much different; maybe even worse.
- G) Even if the lockdown ended immediately, this wouldn't mean that we can just open our doors like a shop can. We will need time to set up a travel schedule, make all necessary arrangements and bookings, produce catalogues and websites, inform our customers, sell the products, and issue all documents.
- H) We cannot even start this "restarting process", because we don't know at what moment of time it will be allowed to travel to which destinations. We **do not have any perspective** or plan about when we can resume our work, and under which conditions and limitations – or if this will be possible ever again. There is no time schedule, and we cannot do any serious financial planning.
- I) Many of us – even the healthiest companies – are considering to rather close their business while they still can, rather than to risk insolvency. Of course, this **endangers** jobs too: the jobs of our drivers, and technicians, and office staff. Hundreds of **thousands of jobs, in Europe**.

Therefore, we ask the political decision-makers of Europe to **help us survive**. With tailor-made measures for our particularly difficult situation. In the interest of the European economy, of our employees, and of our past and future passengers.

PLEASE DON'T LET EUROPE'S BUS BUSINESS DIE! HELP US NOW, WHILE IT IS STILL POSSIBLE!

Some propositions about measures that would really help the bus companies of Europe:

- 1) **Provide us with a perspective.**
Let us know a time schedule about when we will be able to restart our work. From when will we be allowed to drive little local tours? From when within our respective countries? From when internationally? How many passengers per bus will we be allowed to carry? How many seats will we need to leave empty? Of course we are ready to have passengers and drivers carry masks, disinfect the vehicle and the seats, stay at distance from each other, or whatever other measures might make sense. But please: give us a general perspective, even if only rough!
- 2) **Grant us substantial, and fairly distributed financial support.**
Not in form of credits, but in form of non-refundable aids, based upon the concrete needs and size of each individual company. Banks got help, airlines get help – please help us too!
 - a. We urgently need a compensation for the days where we couldn't use our vehicles. Our business is time-related: the buses still cost us a lot of money, every day, which we cannot recover at any point in the future – a day where a vehicle stands still is lost for good.
 - b. We need compensation for the down payments towards touristic service providers which we lost when the lock-down began.
 - c. We need funding to be able to prepare new travel catalogues and programs, to even be able to re-start our activity.
- 3) **Allow us to recover our losses by making our lives easier in the time after the pandemic.**
For example:
 - a. Lower the VAT rate on bus travelling.
 - b. Establish subvention programs for passengers who cannot afford travelling anymore after their own financial losses in the crisis.
 - c. Reduce our administrative charge by reducing bureaucracy related to bus travelling.

We trust that you, as our representatives in government, will not let us die, and that you will help us in a way that we can truly survive the pandemic. Thank you for your attention.