

Brussels, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016

**Dear Members of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs,**

The undersigned European tourism stakeholders have been following with increasing concern developments in the visa waiver reciprocity mechanism applied by the European Union to citizens of the United States and Canada.

The EU enjoys outstanding bilateral relations with the US and Canada, and US and Canadian travellers contribute substantially to the European economy. We, the below listed representatives of the European travel and tourism sector, appeal to the European Union to strictly apply Regulation No 1289/2013, and in particular take into consideration the potential political, economic and administrative consequences of a suspension of the visa waiver system in place with the US and Canada.

Currently, travellers from the US and Canada account for the largest percentage of all extra-European arrivals. In 2015, travel from the US to Europe boomed, aided by a strong economy and a strong US dollar. Emerging as well as mature European destinations have seen visitor numbers from the US and Canada grow, with arrivals from the two markets reaching 30.3 million tourists<sup>1</sup>. US visitors alone spent more than \$54 billion<sup>2</sup> during their stay in 2014.

We believe it is essential for the European Parliament and the Council to resolve the situation, so that it does not come to a suspension of the visa waiver arrangement for US and Canadian citizens. A careful balance needs to be sought between ensuring security for travellers and citizens, while allowing travel flows to continue and prevent a further negative impact on the tourism economy in Europe which is already suffering significantly from recent terrorist attacks.

In 2015<sup>3</sup>, we have seen travellers from North America resilient in their plans to come to Europe. Making it more difficult for US and Canadian citizens to travel to Europe would certainly reverse this trend, deprive the European travel and tourism sector of essential revenue, and put thousands of European jobs at stake in one of the few sectors which experiences a strong growth in employment. This would be contradicting with the European Commission's agenda for growth and jobs.

The European Parliament should encourage the European Commission to continue the talks on the visa reciprocity. We count on the support of the European Parliament to achieve a fair and balanced outcome that will not put more pressure on a European tourism sector already exposed to considerable challenges.

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1 Source: Tourism Economics

2 Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Travel and Tourism Office from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, October 2015

3 Source: ETC Quarterly Report - Q4/2015

## **List of signing organisations**

- **ACI EUROPE** (Airports Council International)
- **Amadeus**
- **CLIA Europe** (Cruise Lines International Association)
- **EAAM** (European Association of Aquatic Mammals)
- **EARTH** (European Alliance for Responsible Tourism and Hospitality)
- **ECF** (European Cyclists' Federation)
- **ECTAA** (The European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Association)
- **EDEN** (European Destinations of Excellence)
- **EFCO & HPA** (European Federation of Campingsite Organisations and Holiday Park Associations)
- **EFFAT** (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions)
- **EGWA** (European Greenways Association)
- **ERF** (European Road Union Federation)
- **ESPA** (European Spas Association)
- **ETAG** (European Travel and Tourism Advisory Group)
- **ETC** (European Travel Commission)
- **ETF** (European Transport Workers' Federation)
- **ETLC** (European Trade Union Liaison Committee on Tourism)
- **ETOA** (European Tourism Association)
- **ETTSA** (European Technology and Travel Services Association)
- **EUFED** (European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations)
- **Eurail Group**
- **EuroGites** (European Federation of Rural Tourism)
- **European Boating Industry**
- **FEST** (Foundation for European Sustainable Tourism)
- **FEG** (European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations)
- **HOTREC** (Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés in Europe)
- **IRU** (International Road Transport Union)
- **ISTO** (International Social Tourism Organisation)
- **NECSTouR** (Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism)
- **Tourism Society Europa**
- **UNI Europa**