COVID-19 EU Briefing 25 September 2020

Synopsis
The ECDC has updated its risk assessment while the Commission was less optimistic regarding a COVID-19 vaccine in the next months. Austria has laid out plans for possible winter vacations whereas Finland has warned against any travel but to 6 countries.

General
Recovery
Vaccine

• The European Commission is not able to say when a COVID-19 vaccine will be available, EU health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides admitted on Thursday 24 September, while earlier today, Belgium’s Minister of Health Maggie De Block told RTBF that Belgium should expect to have a first coronavirus vaccine in March 2021.

Risk Assessment

• The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) published its updated risk assessment regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside a set of guidelines for non-pharmaceutical interventions.
  o Notification rates have increased steadily across the EU and the UK since August.
  o Physical distancing, hygiene and the use of face masks have shown not to be sufficient to reduce or control exposure.
  o While in some countries, the increase affects mainly younger people (15 to 49 years of age) resulting mainly in mild and asymptomatic cases, in other countries the rise leads to more deaths among the elderly.
  o It finally calls for non-pharmaceutical interventions, testing strategies, contact tracing, quarantine measures, adequate risk communication and measures protecting mental health.

Aviation

• Aviation Professionals have called on EU transport ministers to prioritise the sector in their recovery plans.
  o The principle of preserving jobs should guide decisions, incl. making full use of public support schemes, and any personnel-related measures must be agreed upon through genuine social dialogue.
  o New aircraft and aerospace technologies, alternative fuels, and emissions pricing & trading to play a key role.
  o Re-establishing pre-crisis safety standards and levels quickly – and further improving them – must be a priority.
Member States

Infection Rate (measured by positive cases per 100,000 over 14 days)

- The Czech Republic’s infection rate has increased from 218.6 – 229.4 (23/09 compared to 24/09).
- There has also been a rise in France (197.8 – 204.5), Belgium (132.3 – 139.2) and the Netherlands (125.4 – 132.4).
- However, Malta (144.7 – 140.6), Austria (109.5 – 108.4) and Croatia (69.9 – 66.6) have noted a decrease in their respective infection rates.
- The average amongst the EU27+1 has risen from 85.5 to 88.

Austria

- Austria’s government laid out the country’s rules for winter tourism to help preserve the tourist sector in the coming months. While the Christmas markets can open, and skiing will be allowed, so-called ‘après-ski’ parties will be banned.

Finland

- Due to the increase of COVID-19 cases across Europe, the Finnish government decided yesterday (24 September) to reinstate travel restrictions that were eased less than a week ago. From next Monday onwards (28 September), Finnish citizens can travel only to six European countries without having to quarantine upon return, while travelling to any other country is not recommended.
- These six countries are: Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, San Marino, Liechtenstein, and Cyprus.

Portugal

- Portugal’s government decided on Thursday (24 September) to extend the state of contingency in mainland Portugal until 14 October given the increase in COVID-19 cases in the last five weeks.

Sweden

- The Swedish coalition government announced a budget for 2021 to kick-start the economy. The Swedish economy is expected to shrink by 4.6% this year, while the unemployment rate is currently at around 9%.

Source: DeHavillandEU