

EU delays decision on border reopening

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The EU cannot agree on a list of "safe countries" from where travellers could visit Europe in July, with some member states requiring more time to decide, diplomats said Saturday.

After days of talks, EU envoys on Friday agreed to propose a list of 14 countries to their national governments, with the United States, where the [coronavirus](#) is still spreading, to remain excluded.

Croatia, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, requested that countries offer feedback by Saturday at 1600 GMT, with hopes the matter could then be put to a vote among the 27 member states.

"There are still ongoing consultations, which will continue until Monday," an EU source told AFP.

"There is no visibility on where this will go, but the presidency still hopes to put this matter to a vote on Monday," the source added.

The proposed "safe" list contains just fourteen countries: Algeria, Australia, Canada, Georgia, Japan, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Rwanda, Serbia, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia and Uruguay.

Crucially, travellers from China would be approved to enter, but under the condition that Beijing would do the same for Europeans.

Non-essential travel to the EU has been banned since mid-March, but only after member states closed their national borders in confusion and without coordination as the pandemic grew.

The restrictions are to be gradually lifted starting July 1, as the infection rate recedes—at least in Europe—and some countries hoped for close EU coordination.

Whatever is decided in Brussels will exist only as a recommendation since border control remains a national competence and a limited number of flights to and from banned countries have continued throughout the crisis.

Talks dragged on with some EU members wanting to limit the reopening to countries with an epidemiological situation "comparable or better" than that in the bloc—that is with 16 or fewer cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 inhabitants over the past two weeks.

Under that criteria, travellers from the United States, Brazil and Canada would remain banned.

However, the health-based criteria has collided with geopolitics, with some countries reluctant to collectively ban the US while welcoming visitors from China, where the pandemic began.

The United States is currently the country most affected by COVID-19 with more than 125,000 deaths—while Europe believes it has passed the peak of its outbreak.

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