

Austria, Denmark and Italy tentatively emerge from coronavirus lockdown



Vienna, April 15 (RHC)-- The governments of Austria, Denmark and Italy have all begun easing lockdown restrictions, allowing certain segments of the workforce to return to work in a staggered manner, in a bid to revive the countries' ailing economies.

On March 16th, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz ordered everything, except supermarkets and medical facilities, to shut down in the hopes of preventing a coronavirus outbreak similar to the one which ravaged Italy.

Those restrictions were finally beginning to be lifted on Tuesday as non-essential stores under 400 square meters (4,300 square feet), such as hardware stores and garden centers, have opened their doors once more. They will be followed by shopping malls, hairdressers and other larger shops on May 1st.

Restaurants and hotels won't reopen until mid-May at the earliest, and public events likely won't take place in Austria until late June. As the restrictions ease, however, the public will still be required to wear face masks in most shops, supermarkets, pharmacies and on public transport.

"It's not, 'hooray, it's over, and now we carry on as if the whole thing is finished,'" Professor Hans-Peter Hutter, deputy head of the Center for Public Health at the Medical University of Vienna, said.

Some 504,000 people registered unemployed in Austria at the beginning of April, so the government is hoping that its early action to stem the tide of initial infection can be mirrored by an earlier reopening of the economy.

Denmark was also among the first European countries to impose a strict lockdown on its citizens and, in doing so, avoided a significant spike in coronavirus cases, unlike its neighbour Sweden, which opted not to enter a lockdown, relying instead on the theory of herd immunity.

Among the Danish population, there was overwhelming support for the initial lockdown but there is now an apparent backlash at the recently-announced emergence. Denmark will reopen day care centers and schools on April 15, before staggering its economic reawakening, opening small stores and DIY shops, then parks and larger stores, and then the gradual reopening of bars, hotels and restaurants. The public will be asked to wear masks.

The optics of sending the country's children back out into the world first has unnerved many in Danish society, some of whom established the Facebook group, "Mit barn skal ikke være forsøgskanin for covid-19" — roughly translated as "my child is not a guinea pig for COVID-19" — which currently boasts over 39,000 members.

Denmark will continue its ban on gathering of more than 10 people while cafes, restaurants, gyms and hairdressers will remain closed until at least May 10th.

Italy, which took the headlines for weeks as the country's Covid-19 death toll soared and confirmed cases rose inexorably, has reopened bookshops, children's clothes stores and launderettes, in what Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte called "a difficult but necessary decision."

Meanwhile, Spain lifted some lockdown restrictions on Monday, allowing staff in food distribution, communications, sanitation and various other non-essential sectors to return to work, despite the country holding the unenviable title of second-worst coronavirus outbreak in terms of numbers infected.

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