



Statement Observations and Recommendations on the COVID-19 Situation

Brussels, 26 March 2020

In the last weeks, Europe has become the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. An increasing number of Member States has opted for measures that bring public life to a standstill, while health systems and supply chains for goods, including their workers, are struggling with the consequences of a pandemic that is unprecedented in recent history. COVID-19 has, and will in the upcoming months continue to have, a strong impact on the economy, workers, businesses, and every aspect of European citizens' lives.

During the past week, the Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) has gathered immediate observations from its members. As a result, this statement makes suggestions for how to tackle this crisis together.

A key outcome of this exercise is that the continuous functioning of essential services has to be ensured. To do this safely and securely, it is important for our industry that workers be provided with sufficient personal protection and adequate social support structures, which is not satisfactorily guaranteed by many Member States at present. Meanwhile, the police may face labour shortages due to (suspected) infections and increased numbers of locations to be secured. Private security can support public forces, under oversight of the police and under consideration of sector-specific regulation. Cooperation and exchange of information are crucial, and CoESS' national associations stand ready for an enhanced public-private partnership in these challenging times and to discuss a common way forward with competent authorities in the Member States.

The longer-term impact and learnings will be addressed when the time is right, and the crisis is over. Some of the recommendations may seem “out of the box”, but under the circumstances, all the efforts need to be focused in only one direction: protecting our society. Private Security Services are, and have always been, **there to help**.

CoESS and its members express their solidarity with all those affected by the virus outbreak, and those who show exceptional commitment, often under substantial personal sacrifices, to tackling

this crisis and to upholding essential services. CoESS' primary concern is to protect the health and safety of private security workers and to offer support to Member States where needed.

The economic impact on the private security industry

The public health impact of COVID-19 in Europe is unprecedented since World War II, and everyone's utmost priority today must be on saving people's lives and protecting their well-being.

The side effect of this crisis is the slowdown of economic growth all over the world, but particularly in Europe. In this regard, CoESS already welcomes the many financial and economic measures taken by the European Commission's Coordinated Response to counter the economic impact of COVID-19. CoESS counts on EU Member States to help companies of all sizes address urgent liquidity needs, while mitigating the impact of the crisis on European workers. Already during the financial crisis in 2008, publicly financed "short-time work" compensation programmes seem to have proven to be an efficient tool against laying off workers completely, which would have had considerable consequences for workers and businesses alike. CoESS therefore welcomes respective measures taken in a number of EU Member States.

CoESS has observed in the past that the private security industry generally follows the growth of the economy, albeit with a slight delay. We expect a turnover decline in the coming months, as a result. The crisis will also have cascading effects in our members' businesses, which in some cases we may not be able to comprehensively foresee yet. For example, training of guards has come to a halt, which may result in important labour shortages and difficulties to respond to immediate market demands once the crisis is over.

The impact, however, may differ from one company or sector to the other. For example, companies that focus on aviation, in particular passenger and baggage screening, are already severely affected. A longer-term slowdown, or in some countries even halt, of business activities, may have a dramatic effect.

Other areas that have come to a halt are shops other than food, as well as cafés, discothèques, cultural and sports events, museums and exhibitions, trade shows, leisure centres. In most of these locations and events, private security companies (PSCs) and their guards are no longer requested to provide services.

On the other hand, we expect a rise in demand in critical locations, such as hospitals - in particular those that are caring for COVID-19 patients, which probably will be all hospitals and clinics at some stage, whether public or private. We expect that PSCs will be required to help with access control,

guarding locations, perimeter control and perform other missions to secure these locations. PSCs may be asked in reinforcement to escort the transport of critical goods, such as protection gear or other medical goods. PSCs are also already working in supermarkets to enforce physical distancing measures and control the number of people present within the supermarkets.

Meanwhile, PSCs continue to provide services to government buildings and official agencies, embassies, energy facilities, water treatment, manufacturing plants, public transport, ports/maritime, etc.

The need for cooperation and public-private partnerships

Private security has in the past years witnessed increasing demands to take up protective tasks in public spaces. In many countries, the presence of private security guards in transportation, supermarkets, government buildings and hospitals has become the new normal. In this situation, they play an ever more important role next to public forces to ensure compliance with legislation as well as with relevant security and safety measures. Police and PSCs need to share information on the situation and adapt their plans, which they should elaborate together, or at least in a good coordination.

Market needs of public and private clients, in the current crisis, include not only access control tasks at an increasing number of locations, but also consultancy and advice in particular with regards to contingency planning. Crucial exchanges of information need to take place between the providers of private security services and their clients, as well as with authorities, in order to uphold public security and safety - especially if confinement in many countries is going to continue for a longer period and public acceptance of, and compliance with, measures may fluctuate. Unrest at hospitals and supermarkets may be a consequence of the current situation, as we have already witnessed at the closed border between Germany and Poland, where riot police had to be called to calm down stranded people from the Baltic countries.

In addition to such safety concerns and an increasing number of locations that will have to be secured and controlled, public and private security need to discuss and anticipate the future, likely shortage of manpower from both sides. As soon as a worker shows symptoms of an infection and fever, he/she will be asked to stay in quarantine at home.

It is therefore crucial that in this situation, a public-private dialogue is taking place now in order to anticipate, manage and ensure continuity where required. Trade associations, both at national and European level, play a crucial role in facilitating this dialogue, and gathering information and good practices.

In certain Member States, this dialogue is already taking place between PSCs and authorities and/or police, and CoESS recommends the exchange of best practice among Ministers of the Interior on this matter, under coordination of the European Council and Commission.

Leveraging the manpower of the private security industry

Clearly all the Member States' efforts are now focused on supporting society in the race against the virus. But as mentioned, the spread of the virus may lead to a substantial shortage of manpower that is able to secure the growing numbers of locations that have to be controlled and protected.

In view of staff shortages and changing needs, a key element is to be able to adapt and to use existing human resources in a smart way. PSCs are ready to serve under direct instructions of the police, if the protection of workers is guaranteed, where this is needed and possible, and does not infringe the duties that are the prerogative of public forces - while complying with health and safety instructions of WHO, the EU, national and local authorities.

To this end, CoESS suggests that Member States consider, in cooperation with national private security associations, temporary flexibility with sector-specific legislation, to allow staff allocations from one sector to the other. For example, staff previously assigned to airports, which are witnessing a drop in activities, may be assigned to hospital protection / access control. Also, with the fact that borders are being closed in several countries and witnessing scenes of public unrest, there may be supportive tasks that PSCs could help with, in order to compensate for staff shortages. There may, in some countries, be a range of legal challenges or concerns regarding insurance, but this is an exceptional situation, and flexibility may be required for the common good in order to cope with more immediate needs.

In a number of countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, PSCs are considered as delivering an essential service, be it under direct instructions of the police or in securing public and private locations, and the legal framework allows for the police to use private security staff in case of emergencies. In the current situation, this may be an avenue to explore in other countries, provided the selection and training requirements for security agents is appropriate, their personal protection is guaranteed, and under due consideration of existing, sector-specific regulation in EU Member States.

Addressing the needs of our workers: protective equipment and social care

In the COVID-19 crisis, private security guards deliver different essential services and, as a consequence, come into contact with the general public. To guarantee safety and health of our



workers and clients, it is crucial that they be equipped adequately and get the appropriate personal protective equipment, hydro-alcoholic gels and disinfectants. CoESS calls on Member States to continue stepping up efforts to provide workers in need with the necessary protection, and welcomes the European Commission’s strategic “rescEU stockpile” and joint procurement initiatives. Also, the “EU Healthy Gateways Joint Action” has been very helpful in providing important advice for public health measures to be taken for the air, maritime, and land transport sectors.

CoESS additionally highlights that, during lockdowns, it is essential that private security agents, who are by the nature of their tasks not able to perform telework, are authorised to circulate and, where needed and appropriate, cross borders in order to reach work.

Also, schools and nurseries stay open in many EU Member States for the children of employees of essential sectors and, as listed above, CoESS believes such services should be further extended to private security staff. This is already the case today in the Netherlands, where private security services are considered as essential services. Also, in certain countries such as Belgium, there is a priority access to shops (fast track) for people working in essential services, such as healthcare and police, and CoESS believes this should be extended to PSC agents, who are delivering services essential to public safety and security.

With regard to currently existing safety rules, CoESS believes that there must be a specific regulation in place for Monitoring Rooms / Control Rooms of PSCs, that, in case of contamination, allows them to be operated from a remote location until further decontamination measures have been conducted. These rooms perform an integral public safety and security task and should be part of essential services to be ensured during lockdown periods. If operated from a remote location, all legal requirements including (cyber-)security, privacy and data protection, have of course to be strictly abided by in a continuous mode.

CoESS will continue to gather information and best practice and is available for any further clarification or assistance.