UNWTO COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
Fifty-Second Meeting
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Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda

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COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Note by the Secretary-General

In this document, Mr. Marjan Hribar, Director General of the Tourism Directorate of Slovenia and Chairman of the Commission for Europe (CEU), presents his views on the present situation of tourism in Europe and on the role of the UNWTO.
COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Members of Commission for Europe, dear colleagues and friends!

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to Katowice. Let me express our sincere thanks to our host, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism of Poland and to all other persons and institutions that have contributed to organize these events.

This is the second year of Slovenia’s chairmanship of the Commission for Europe and despite very challenging times during the last two years I must express my appreciation to the Members of the Commission for Europe for their significant contribution to the work of the Organization through their direct participation in its activities and by providing us, through the different surveys, with their views and policies on key areas of the Organization’s work.

Tourism year 2010

It is said that the global crisis is over. Figures in tourism sector are confirming this statement: after a decline of 4% in year 2009, the international tourist arrivals were up to almost 7% in 2010. Growth was mostly driven by emerging markets with Asia leading with +13%, followed by Middle East with +14% and Americas with 7.7%, with South America reaching a double-digit growth.

Europe as a mature tourism market has achieved a 3.2% growth, still showing differences between regions. While Northern Europe could not achieve a positive growth in 2010 Western Europe has been more successful with 5.1% and Central and Eastern Europe with +4.2% growth. Recovery in Europe has been moderate also because of the eruption of the volcano in Iceland in April last year, which has affected the travel sector.

International tourism receipts have reached 781 billion €, which is +7% compared to 2009. It represents a vital part on the income side of national economies and is expected to grow by 6.6% per annum in next decade (WTTC 2011).

In fact, the international tourism sector has recovered from the impacts of the crisis even faster than expected, once again confirming its resiliency. Furthermore, tourism is, and will be even more in the near future, an important player in the global economy with its capacity to create fair jobs, enhance national development in a sustainable manner and support transformation to the Green Economy.

Last year I pointed out, how tourism is an important sector for economic recovery, yet it is still not recognized as one of the priority sectors within many national economies nor does it enjoy the recognition it deserves. In order to make a big step forward in this direction, the UNWTO and WTTC are now launching a campaign “Global Leaders for Tourism” with the aim to position travel and tourism higher on the global agenda.

Significance and highlights of the year 2010

Almost the most significant part of the post crisis development all around the world is the green growth of national economies. Due to concerns regarding the environmental unsustainability of economic growth and the post crisis direction to encourage recovery on more sustainable foundation, countries seek ways to better support green growth, and draw up policies with combined economic, environmental and social objectives at all levels.
Tourism, having strong economic multiplier effects, can in fact play a leading role in this transformation process, but it has to be adequately encouraged.

Global and regional institutions and associations have already declared their commitment to green growth; they are conducting research activities and building up green strategies. Consequently, national and local governments are implementing sustainable principles into their policies and programs.

What is green growth and why is it so important?

Green growth is an economic growth, respecting the environment, biodiversity and sustainably using the natural resources.

Development in the last decades has been fast and strong, but has also affected the natural resources, biodiversity, climate and the environment. Economic activities strongly influence the environment. Recent crisis and climate changes will have an increasing impact on our lives in the near future. This has opened the door for new growth models putting the sustainable use of environment and natural resources in the forefront. Using the same old models of growth will on the other side lead to severe changes and deterioration of living conditions for our descendants.

International accomplishments in terms of sustainable development and the targets that have been agreed are weaker than expected. Industrialised countries are reducing their emissions, yet on a lower scale than it is needed to stay within a 2 degrees Celsius temperature increase.

In terms of biodiversity loss, countries have failed to meet the 2010 target to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss globally as agreed in 2002, due to the unsustainable use of natural resources, invasive alien species, climate change and pollution as well as land use changes. The OECD foresees continued biodiversity loss in the coming decade unless there is a significant policy shift.

Enhanced action is also required to diminish unsustainable use and pollution of water. Countries still do not implement water resources management and water efficiency plans successfully.

Countries must assure political commitment to sustainable development, to secure the transition to “green economy”. Corresponding effective institutional framework for sustainable development is of great importance.

The issue of sustainability has a strong international effect and cannot be dealt with on a national level only, but internationally. Between international initiatives and frameworks countries must set their own ways to deal with key challenges and make policy shifts to change the business as usual actions.

Good governance and adequate policy frameworks are needed. Bottom-up approach to governance with involvement of local communities (community-based governance) makes the foundation for successful implementation of measures. Because of the international nature of sustainability issues, global, national and regional information, knowledge exchange and learning is important.

The whole new range of activities, technologies, jobs and skills open when shifting to green growth, all in the framework of the structural changes that are needed in the transition process. A wide range of cost-effective technologies are being developed, new skills will be needed and employment posts opened. For instance, the renewable industry in EU has in only 5 years increased its work force from 230,000 to 550,000. Construction sector, after
being hit hard by the economic crisis, can recover through renovation and building of energy efficient buildings.

Hotel industry shows strong trend towards building green accommodation. Rapid growth in investment is expected especially in emerging and developing economies; developed countries or destinations will however invest into adaption of tourism offer, adjusting it to sustainable concepts and redirecting to energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources.

Investment in tourism sector represents about 10% of the total investment value worldwide and can reach up to 50% (UNEP). The goal is to seek carbon-neutral and energy efficient growth.

Investment will go beyond tourism sector only. It will be directed also to conservation of parks and protected areas, public amenities, airports, land and rail transport.

Last year we have celebrated the World Tourism day delivering special attention to Tourism and Biodiversity. 2010 was also the International Year of Biodiversity, which coincided with the target adopted by governments in 2002 to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

This celebration was a unique opportunity to raise public awareness and support regarding the importance of biodiversity for tourism and human well-being, and also to show the important role tourism plays in mainstreaming nature and biodiversity-friendly solutions.

**UNWTO has been very active in the European region in 2010**

Tourism has the capacity to develop in a responsible (sustainable) way and still be competitive. The message that was communicated at the ITB Berlin by Mr. Taleb Rifai in fact accentuates that tourism can facilitate a fair, strong and more sustainable growth. Tourism can become one of the most effective agents of development.

Tourism in fact has a unique position to boost green growth all around the world in each country and destination. In order to realise this it needs to be positioned higher in the global agenda, it needs a strong and clear support from governments.

In tourism and the travel sector, over 80% of activities are carried out by SMEs, which constitute the supply chains of tourism and travel. UNWTO and other international organisations are developing practical tool kits to help and support the sustainable development of SMEs (improving water management, reducing energy use, using local products and services). UNWTO project Hotel Energy Solutions – an innovative toolkit for hotels, is being tested in pilot destinations. It will deliver free-of-charge technical support to increase hotels’ potential savings through use of energy efficient and renewable energy technologies. The e-tool kit and its results will be available by June 2011.

During last years and decades new partnerships have arisen aiming at building economic, social, cultural, financial and other partnerships (Baltic Sea Macro-Region, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, Regional Cooperation Council in South East Europe etc.).

Regional tourism development is a growing trend in Europe, where we find examples in the regions of the Baltic Sea, Scandinavia, Carpathian, South Caucasus, Danube, Mediterranean and other regions. Let us take advantage of already existing regions and develop interstate partnerships to make European tourism more competitive in the global market. Let us make additional efforts to attract tourists to Europe and to boost our national economies with support of the tourism sector.
UNWTO actively supports such regional cooperation efforts, inter alia, in the Black Sea Region, the Carpathian and the South Caucasus region and the new initiative the Caspian Sea, where the UNWTO is planning to assist in the assessment of the tourism potential in the region. The respective Member states are inviting UNWTO to play a leading role in processes of strategic positioning and promotion.

In addition, we strongly believe that the 2nd Edition of the European capacity building programme on tourism statistics that will be hosted by Azerbaijan during 2011-2012 will be another milestone in the improvement of tourism data of which all of us are so much dependent in our decision making processes.

UNWTO is very active throughout the European region. In Serbia it is involved in the MDG-F joint programme (with UNDP, FAO, UNEP and UNICEF) to stimulate a sustainable rural tourism development, while in Turkey it implements the MDG-F joint programme on “Alliance for Cultural tourism in Eastern Anatolia”.

UNWTO supports countries’ efforts to develop tourism in regions and destinations with the elaboration of tourism development strategies, establishment of governance structures, providing training courses for tourism stakeholders and designing other tailor-made services for them.

Important progress has been made in the Silk Road Programme, where countries engaged have agreed upon an Action Plan to outline future joint actions.

2011 and beyond

Mr. Taleb Rifai stressed in his speech at ITB how tourism, and other service sectors like culture, sports, creative industries and entertainment, will become one of the most dynamic and economically significant industries and development agents of this decade. I believe we all can confirm that travel and tourism will significantly mark this decade.

International tourism faces changes on the demand side, which leads tourism stakeholders towards new plans in infrastructure and product/service development. The importance of emerging markets is intensifying, shifting economic benefits to Asia, which registers double-digit growth in outbound tourism, while Europe is struggling with low growth. Travel patterns are shifting to more domestic and regional travel, tourists making more and shorter trips, looking for the value for money, which they tend to spend very carefully. Emerging tourist segments from BRIC countries are already urging managers in travel and tourism to adapt tour packages and thus to influence the growing demands to reduce regulatory travel barriers.

Our future in tourism will be marked with energy solutions, especially regarding accommodation facilities. The EU Directive on energy performance of building sets the objective that new building built from 2021 will have to be nearly zero-energy buildings. Cases show that this is already an on-going process, with hotels all around Europe showing examples of almost zero-energy use due to using of renewable energy, solar power and other solutions.

Countries will be investing into green infrastructure to make buildings more energy efficient, public transport more sustainable, use of water more prudent, waste management further improved and to facilitate the use of renewable energy sources.

Of course, new solutions and adaptation of buildings need strong financial injections and some countries are using national funds or structural EU funds. The need to invest will boost sectors offering energy-saving equipment. The analysis foresees that over the next decade
such investment will rise up to 200 billion €. This will bring opportunities for new business ideas and development of enterprises.

**Words of thanks**

I have to express my sincere thanks to Mr. Eduardo Fayos-Sola for his excellent cooperation acting as a Regional Representative for Europe. Once again I extend my heartfelt congratulation for the new position as the Head of the Knowledge Network and wish him all the success for this challenging task.

I also wish to thank Mr. Zoltan Somogy, Executive Director for Member Relations and Services, for bringing new innovative aspects to UNWTO’s relations with Member States.

Special thanks have to be given to Ms Cordula Wohlmuther, Deputy Regional Director for Europe and her team of the Regional Programme for Europe for the permanent excellent cooperation, their outstanding efficiency and expert advice in all matters related to the UNWTO and Europe.

In this turbulent time, marked with crisis and economic downturns throughout the world, the UNWTO has more than before linked up with the Commission for Europe in the search for vision for further tourism development.

Thanks for this goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Taleb Rifai. Under his leadership the UNWTO has developed into a strong, prudent and solid organization and partner. We are thankful for all the support and look forward to successful cooperation in the future.