Jobs, Recovery, Sustainability: European Tourism Leaders Meet as Sector Restarts

Yerevan, Armenia, 3 June 2022 – The European Member States of UNWTO have highlighted the importance of jobs, professional training and sustainability and innovation as they jointly guide the recovery of tourism across the region.

The 67th meeting of the UNWTO Commission for Europe (Yerevan, Armenia, 1-3 June 2022) convened as the restart of European tourism gathered pace. Of the 47 countries in the world that have lifted all restrictions on travel, 31 are in Europe. Against this backdrop, Member States looked to the future to address both short-term challenges and longer-term opportunities for tourism to grow as a driver of sustainable and inclusive development.

High-level representatives from 35 Members States and many representatives of the European and global tourism private sectors were given an overview of UNWTO’s work in the region since the last Regional Commission meeting in Athens in June 2021.

Political recognition

Opening the session, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Hambardzum Matevosyan called tourism a “locomotive” for recovery and opportunity, both in Europe and globally. With Armenia celebrating 25 years as a UNWTO Member State, Mr Matevosyan commended the Organization’s work in bridging the public and private sectors and making tourism a pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili met personally with the President of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan with the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan, acknowledging their leadership and support for tourism and discussing ways in which UNWTO can further support the country as it grows its tourism in size and significance, with a focus on investments and on rural development.

Also opening the session were the Minister of the Economy for Armenia, Vahan Kerobyan, and Sofia Zacharaki, Deputy Minister of Tourism of Greece and current Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission. Ms Zacharaki also commended UNWTO’s leadership through the crisis and stressed that the determination to restart tourism for economic recovery “must not outweigh our efforts to become more sustainable”.

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UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “From the start of the pandemic and into the recovery phase of the crisis, Europe has led by example in supporting and restarting tourism. At the heart of this has been cooperation and coordination, the same spirit that must lead all European destinations forward as they use the power of tourism to drive development and growth for all.”

Ms. Sisian Boghossian, Chair of the Tourism Committee of the Ministry of Economy emphasised: “Armenia reasserts its commitment to effective cooperation with all UNWTO member states to achieve the joint goals aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Tourism is a priority sector of the economy in Armenia which is not only defined in the Law on Tourism but also expressed in the political agenda and included in the Government´s program”.

**Delivering results**

The Secretary-General provided an updated overview of the latest international tourism data and trends and made clear how even in challenging times, UNWTO advanced its priority areas of work, with a focus on boosting tourism investments, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, tourism jobs and education and accelerating sustainability.

UNWTO Regional Director for Europe, Alessandra Priante, highlighted current initiatives and future regional implementation of the UNWTO programme of work, stressing the importance of fostering the successful methodology of cooperation with and within the most visited region in the world: Europe. She pointed out the landmark projects focused on youth, with the first Global Youth Tourism Summit to be hosted in Sorrento, Italy, the Students’ Leagues in the various European countries and on rural development, with the 2nd edition of the World’s Best Tourism Villages following the great successes of the initiative in 2021, and UNWTO’s technical assistance projects supporting tourism recovery to grow back sustainably and responsibly were further highlights.

As part of the high-level policy discussion, delegates highlighted the need to balance short-term measures for enabling a swift recovery of tourism, notably addressing workforce shortages, making jobs more attractive and retaining the right talent with sustainability imperatives, including measurement, investing in tourism education, and capacity-building.

**Tourism and Rural Development**

On the occasion of the Commission Meeting, UNWTO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the support of the government of Armenia, partnered to set the stage for a discussion about tourism’s role in rural development and how to build bigger synergies between agriculture and tourism.

With a special focus on design thinking to enhance local experiences and add value to destinations, gastronomy and wine tourism, the event highlighted the need to work on infrastructure, governance, product development, collaboration frameworks, quality and market access, digitalization and capacity building. Counting on the participation
of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the conference highlighted the value of intellectual property to protect and value of local products and processes. The event closed with a Masterclass on Gastronomy Tourism to support knowledge building and capacity for Members States and stakeholders in Armenia.

Members of the region unanimously agreed to have Bulgaria host the 68th session of the UNWTO Regional Commission in 2023.

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