



Commission for Europe

31 MAY – 2 JUNE 2023, SOFIA, BULGARIA

COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIR (GREECE)

Esteemed Secretary-General,

Esteemed Vice-Chairs,

Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to meet you in Bulgaria, a country with rich cultural and natural resources, and Sofia, a vibrant city, with great hospitality, gastronomy, and people. Please allow me also to personally thank Minister Dimitrov for the excellent organization and his warm welcome to all delegations.

Once again, we meet at a critical moment. It has been a year since the last meeting of the Commission of Europe in Yerevan in June 2022, where we expressed our common commitment to: intensify coordination among member states and the private sector towards a more resilient and greener tourism, encourage product and services diversification, invest in human resources and promote the economic significance of the tourism sector so as to also be reflected at the political level.

According to the issue of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer in January, international tourism reached 63% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022, driven by strong demand and the lifting of travel restrictions around the world. Europe welcomed 585 million arrivals in 2022, almost 80% of pre-pandemic levels (-21% over 2019). In 2022, despite high inflation and geopolitical instability, European tourism experienced an impressive post-pandemic rebound, setting the stage for an even stronger 2023.

During this period, the Regional Commission for Europe of the UNWTO has consistently been at the forefront of the collective UNWTO effort to advance our common goals for European tourism, by reinforcing the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – especially during the period of recovery and also beyond. Extensive efforts were also undertaken to advance alignment and consensus building over common priorities among member states, partnerships with the private sector and major stakeholders to make tourism increasingly more resilient, and to promote green investments, innovation, digital transformation, human resource deployment and capacity building, and employment.



As Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Europe, let me cordially thank H.E. Secretary General for his effective leadership, and all my Colleagues - Members of the Commission for Europe, for their close cooperation and efforts to restore traveller confidence and advance the adaptability of the tourism ecosystem to the new trends and reality that emerged after the pandemic. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Regional Director for Europe, Dr Alessandra Priante, for her dedication and commitment to the Commission's work as well as to the Secretariat, UNWTO experts, and the team of the Regional Department for Europe for its constant valuable assistance to the Members.

On behalf of the Greek Government and the Ministry of Tourism, I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation for the constructive collaboration during the discussions over the Rules of Procedure for the "Redesigning Tourism for the Future" Task Force, as a subsidiary organ of the Executive Council, the workings of the technical committees, the Best Tourism Villages initiative's effective implementation, the Start-up competitions and the technical assistance projects undertaken to strengthen tourism, by addressing challenges that affect the sector in various parts of the world. Aware of the shift in tourism demand and ready to serve a flexible and responsive sector, UNWTO also organized a large variety of thematic conferences to foster product innovation and cooperation across stakeholders at international, regional and destination level, with particular focus on, inter alia, Wine and Gastronomy Tourism, providing exposure of the rural tourism as part of UNWTO's overall strategy. Furthermore, we appreciate the efforts to increase in number and variety the Online Academy courses, and the offer of scholarships, acknowledging the urgent need for incentives and bright career perspectives for youth to work in the sector.

Furthermore, we would like to draw special attention to the findings of Members' Priorities for the UNWTO Programme of Work & Budget for the Period 2024-2025 and the long-term vision to ensure strategic guidance and the readiness of the Organization, and of the Commission for Europe, to meet member states' expectations for an effective management of the European tourism for the following years, in terms of sustainability, inclusion, competitiveness, human capital and governance. A long-term and well-formed vision and targeted planning of activities is not only what the member-states expect, for a holistic approach to tourism development and management, but also what the private sector anticipates in order to invest in tourism. In this regard, we support the extensive efforts to strengthen member relations, networking with the private travel and tourism sector, as well as institutional cooperation in Europe (especially the institutions of the European Union and the European Travel Commission) and, of course, the message displayed and the visibility provided to tourism, in wider terms, by an institutionalized presence of the UNWTO at the United Nations General Assembly.

Within this framework, I firmly believe it is now the right moment to discuss and reach an agreement on the issue of a specific Agenda for Europe, the strongest Region of the UNWTO, with a specific budget drawn from the UNWTO regular budget (membership contributions) to meet the Agenda's objectives and its Action Plan, which will be the outcome of our collective

work. The Agenda for Europe will be in tune with the UNWTO Strategic Objectives and Programmatic Priorities, to achieve the highest standards of performance in tourism policy elaboration and governance at European level. An Agenda for Europe is what we need at this specific moment to return value to the members of the Region of Europe, implement projects that will directly benefit them (related, for example, to capacity building, special interest tourism, talent empowerment, DMOs, etc) while simultaneously supporting less privileged areas of the region and attracting new members. The structure of the Agenda, eventually upon the model of the Agenda for Africa, will come as an outcome of consultations among us.

Under the ripple effects of geopolitical disruption and energy crisis, as tourism is recovering, new challenges emerge for accelerating sustainable consumption and production patterns and focusing on catalytic interventions in fields of high importance, such as climate action. New opportunities arise, especially in areas related to the management of people, the promotion of autonomy in decision-making at all levels, the investment in new products and experiences, the digitalization of the sector and the financing for infrastructure, mainly in terms of connectivity, including digital connectivity. According to the recent European Economic Forecast (spring 2023), the global headline inflation fell from the 2022 peaks, but core inflation does not yet display a clear downward trend. Prospects for emerging markets other than China remain rather muted, with slower growth expected in 2023, and only a modest pick-up in 2024. However, tourism, and particularly European tourism, has by now proven its resilience.

In Greece in 2022, travel receipts totalled €17,676.2 million, up by 68.3% compared with 2021. The number of inbound travellers in 2022 rose by 96.0% to 29,875.8 thousand, from 15,246.1 thousand in 2021. Total receipts from cruise passengers in 2022 rose by 145.7% year on year to €493.4 million. In January-February 2023, travel receipts totalled €465.3 million, up by 76.4% compared to the same period of 2022. According to the recent market study of the European Travel Commission, “Exploring Consumer Travel Attitudes and Expectations to Drive Tourism Recovery”, the prospects for 2023 are even better. In January-February 2023, the number of inbound travellers rose by 83.5% to 1,208.1 thousand (January-February 2022: 658.4 thousand). This is mainly attributed to our commitment to support investments and ameliorate governance at destination level, promote public private partnerships in the Greek tourism, experience-based products, innovative business practices and market intelligence for all. Furthermore, we are receiving similarly encouraging feedback from our UNWTO European partners as more and more services are offered to visitors in special interest tourism, and market access is constantly improving (air connectivity).

Nevertheless, in order to support the long-term perspective and potential of the sector, we must retain sustainability at the forefront of our efforts. Sustainability criteria must drive tourism investments and we need to stress on availability of data to measure and benchmark sustainability in tourism. Within this framework, the Statistical Framework for Measuring Tourism Sustainability (MST) method to study the economic, social and environmental

linkages of tourism has particular relevance as well as the worldwide appeal of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, the Global Plastics in Tourism Initiative and the impact of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories to unlock the power of evidence-based decision making at the destination-level. I would like also to refer at this point to the Sustainable Coastal and Maritime Tourism Research and Monitoring Centre that we are developing in Greece in cooperation with UNWTO.

At national level, the Recovery and Resilience Plan "Greece 2.0", which is financed by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), includes individual projects aimed at improving Greece's tourism infrastructure, creating a modern, differentiated, and competitive tourism product, strengthening the added value of human resources working in tourism, advancing the digital transformation of the sector, and in general the promotion of sustainable and geographically balanced tourism development. The wide range of interventions to boost tourism resilience in Greece encompasses the creation of Destination Management and Marketing Organizations (DMMOs), upskilling and reskilling of human capital in tourism, improved data management through the use of advanced information systems for the digitization of the operation of the Ministry of Tourism at national, regional and local level, and of the GNTA, as well as access to data provision for tourism enterprises and the public. Other projects include integrated financial tools and framework for the sustainable development of mountain tourism, rural tourism, gastronomic tourism and spa tourism as well as of tourist port infrastructure, and upgrade of services and infrastructure for the elderly and the disabled. In addition, we move quickly and efficiently with regard to our reform agenda for the development of maritime tourism, through the Tourist Ports Committee, working on the regime of operation and the suitable expansion of the national network of tourist marinas.

The upgrade of the tourism infrastructure in Greece, with an emphasis on sustainable development and the green and blue economy has already commenced and constitutes our pledge for the coming years, with its main axes involving the protection of the environment and the preservation of the identity of the country and its rich cultural heritage. In parallel, we are promoting the contribution of consumers in the green transition by increasing demand for sustainable tourism experiences, adapting the tourism offer and the national tourism communication campaign accordingly. Reflecting the importance that the Ministry attributes to the sector's green transition, the Greek National Tourism Organization campaigns for 2023 focus on sustainable tourism, nature, environmental protection, and the unique travel experience that Greece offers, taking into consideration that nowadays 1 in 2 travelers worldwide choose to travel to a destination that focuses on green growth. Moreover, the Greek State is thoroughly examining various megatrends, such as over tourism, the sharing economy, social and demographic changes, emerging destinations, security and crisis management in tourism.

Esteemed Representatives,

The UNWTO and the Commission for Europe have demonstrated their full commitment to the principles of international law, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty, while promoting Sustainable Development Goals and the prosperity that tourism can ensure for all by reducing poverty and inequality and dispersing the benefits of tourism to the local communities, when adopting a holistic approach to destination management. The Organization also took the lead during the pandemic crisis, and it is imperative that this continues, to enhance multilateral coordination for international mobility to increase tourism competitiveness and sustainability, while building crisis preparedness.

The international tourism landscape is extremely dynamic with an environment that is constantly changing in a very unpredictable manner. It requires policy makers, who are critical thinkers and creative problem solvers, to constantly adjust policies, and product offerings in tandem with market dynamics.

Submitting the candidacy of Greece as a Vice-Chair of the Commission of Europe, we reiterate our deep engagement in tourism development in this continent and in the enhancement of its impact within the UNWTO. Given its experience as a Chairman of the UNWTO Commission for Europe and constituting a world-class tourism destination, Greece is committed to promote the agenda of the Organization a step further, working closely with the Chair of the Commission and the member-states to deliver added-value outcomes for a sustainable, digital, and resilient international tourism ecosystem. We declare our engagement as the most fervent advocate of the principles of UNWTO, defending the value of tourism as a driver of socioeconomic growth, with the ultimate goal to place it exactly where it belongs: at the forefront of international relations and politics.