



Commission for Europe

31 MAY – 2 JUNE 2023, SOFIA, BULGARIA

Side Conference – 2 June 2023

## **EDUCATION AND SKILLS IN MEDICAL AND WELLBEING TOURISM**

Speakers



**H.E. Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili**  
**Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization**

Zurab Pololikashvili has been Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) since January 2018. Prior to this, he worked in several high-level roles in both the private and public sectors.

After graduating with a degree in banking, Mr Pololikashvili gained extensive experience in the private sector, including with a prominent role in one of Georgia's biggest banks and as CEO of the country's leading football team, FC Dinamo Tbilisi.

After a year as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was appointed the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to Spain, Andorra, Algeria and Morocco in 2006, and was then his country's Minister of Economic Development between 2009 and 2010. In this position, Mr Pololikashvili oversaw the development of tourism within Georgia, establishing the sector as a leading employer and contributor to national economic development.

At the 23rd General Assembly of the UNWTO, Member States unanimously approved his plan of action for global tourism, including the landmark Agenda for Africa and his focus on promoting tourism as a driver of gender equality, job creation and rural development. At the end of 2021, during the 24th UNWTO General Assembly, Member States voted for Mr Pololikashvili to serve a second term as Secretary-General.



**H.E. Mr. Ilin Dimitrov, PhD.**  
**Minister of Tourism of Bulgaria**

In 2022, Mr. Dimitrov took office as the Minister of Tourism of Bulgaria and Chairman of the permanent Commission on Tourism of the 47<sup>th</sup> National Assembly.

He was previously the President of the Varna Chamber of Tourism between 2020 and 2021. During 11 years before that, Mr. Dimitrov was a professor at the College of Tourism-Varna and the director of the "Careers, Marketing and Entrepreneurship" center at University of

Economics of Varna.

He holds a PhD in Tourism, Master in Business Administration and Bachelor's degrees in Marketing and Management, Business Administration, and Hotel and Restaurant Management.



**Mr. Thierry Dubois**  
**President, European Spas Association**

Thierry Dubois was Chairman of the Managing Board of the Saujon Spa Group, and from 2014 he is Chairman of the Group's Supervisory Board. The group includes a 150-bed psychiatric clinic, a spa specializing in psychosomatic disorders, and a wellness centre.

He has been President of the Conseil National des Etablissements Thermaux (CNETH) for 14 years. The CNETH is the French professional association that groups together all the 110 French thermal baths,

medical resorts.

Since 2016 Thierry Dubois is the President of the European Spas Association. ESPA brings together more than 20 European countries and maintains relations about development of medical spas with number of countries such as China, the United States, Ukraine, Georgia, Thailand, Japan.

He is also the Vice-President of the Association Française pour la Recherche Thermale (AFRETh), which is the association for thermal research, which publish every year many clinical trials in international English-language journals with high impact factor. Thierry Dubois is also Vice-President of the French Thermal and Climatic Federation, which brings together all the associations linked to balneotherapy.



**Ms. Csilla Mezösi**  
**Secretary-General, European Spas Association**

Since 2000 she has been involved in the activities of ESPA, by 2002 she became a member of the Board and from 2018 she is the Secretary General.

During her career Csilla Mezösi has been involved in strategic project management on behalf of urban and national government administrations to develop projects in the Health Tourism sector. She worked more than 20 years in the German tourism industry focusing

on destination promotion.

Ms. Mezösi has a broad experience ranging from B2B and B2C sales activities to international PR, event organization, management consultancy, Spa development, cross marketing companies and medical tourism promotion. She also developed contacts between providers and health insurances. As Secretary General, she is active in cooperations with EU Policies, stakeholder groups DG Sante, Tourism and Sport, in the Tourism Manifesto Group, opening activities and cooperations in the overseas market and exchanging expertise with the UNWTO in the fields of health and spa tourism. Thierry Dubois was Chairman of the Managing Board of the Saujon Spa Group, and from 2014 he is

Chairman of the Group's Supervisory Board. The group includes a 150-bed psychiatric clinic, a spa specializing in psychosomatic disorders, and a wellness centre.



**H.E. Mrs. Ieva Valeškaitė**  
**Deputy Minister of Economy and Innovation of Lithuania**

Ieva Valeškaitė is the Vice – Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania. Previously, Ieva has served in Ministry as an adviser to the Minister. Since joining the position of Vice - Minister, I. Valeškaitė has been in charge of better regulation and business supervision, of the business tax environment. As well, after joining the team, the Vice – Minister has established an economic analysis unit in the Ministry.

The Vice - Minister has 10 years of work experience in the fields of economic policy analysis, business regulation and taxation, and has implemented tax projects in the Lithuanian and foreign non-governmental sector. I. Valeškaitė, 34, worked for five years at the Lithuanian Free Market Institute as a senior policy expert, curating projects related to improving the business environment, increasing the quality of legislation and the transparency of the tax system, and simplifying tax administration. From 2012 to 2015, she worked in the Foreign and European Union Affairs Division of the Office of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

Ieva Valeškaitė has completed two bachelor's studies - international economics and political science, as well as master's studies in applied macroeconomics at Vilnius University. She speaks English and Russian.



**H.E. Mrs. Mariam Kvrivishvili**  
**Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia**

Mariam Kvrivishvili is the Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia since May 2021. Prior to this role, she served as a Member of the Parliament of Georgia, holding various positions including First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration and Member of the Committee on Sectoral Economics and Economic Policy. She was actively involved in parliamentary associations and delegations, representing Georgia in international forums.

Mariam Kvrivishvili pursued a Master's degree candidacy at ESM Business School (Free University) and holds a Bachelor's degree in Marketing from the International Black Sea University. She also completed a short course in Business Administration at Berkeley University in California, USA.

Languages: English, Russian



**Mrs. Maryana Oleskiv**  
**Chairperson, State Agency for Tourism Development,**  
**Ukraine**

Mariana travelled by herself around the country during 2003 – 2006 and studied Ukraine from small villages to big cities while creating a website about vacations in Ukraine [Nezabarom.com.ua](http://Nezabarom.com.ua). She worked in the hospitality industry of three largest tourism centres – Lviv, Odesa and Kyiv. In June 2020, she started a promotion company «Travel Ukraine» in order to develop domestic tourism in Ukraine.

2016-2018 – Director at LME «Lviv Centre for Tourism Development».

2011-2015 – Head of the Division of Tourism Agencies and Travel Bureau at Ltd «Slupskyi».

2011-2012 – Deputy Head of the Department – Head of Tourism Division at Department of Culture and Tourism at Odesa City Council.

2007-2009 – Head of the Advertisement Division at «Initia Events» (Kyiv).

Since 3 March 2020, she is the Chairperson of the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine.



**Mrs. Silvia Doušová**  
**Director of Tourism Department, Ministry of Regional**  
**Development, Czechia**

Silvia Doušová has been working as the Head of the Tourism Department at the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic since March 2023.

She has previous experience from the Office of the Government and the Ministry of the Interior. She participated in the preparation of the first Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in 2009.

In the years 2018-2022, she worked as the deputy mayor of Kutna Hora, a UNESCO city, and was, among other responsibilities, overseeing the field of tourism and destination management.



**Dr. Siyka Katsarova**  
**President, Bulgarian Union of Balneology and Spa Tourism**

Since May 2016, Dr. Siyka Katsarova is a Vice-President of the European Spas Association.

Her portfolio of responsibilities: Marketing, Innovations and Partnerships with other organizations related to the health tourism. She is member of the Board of the organization since May 2007.

She is one of the founder of the Bulgarian Union of Balneology and spa tourism BUBSPA (2006), the National-representative product non-governmental organization, partner of the Ministry of tourism and since March 2018 she is its President.

Dr. Katsarova has more 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry of Bulgaria, last 15 years were devoted to the development of the Bulgarian and European health tourism (Marketing and PR). She was a key expert of the working group who create the regulation in the field of the medical spa, spa and wellness tourism in the Bulgarian National Legislation in the field of tourism (approved with the Tourism Act, January 2016).

Since June 2017th Dr Katsarova is a managing Board member of the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce and a Chairman of the Tourism Committee.

Dr. Katsarova is a founder and a managing partner of the company „MEDSPA BG“JSC (January 2011). The company is a facilitator in the field of medical tourism.



**Dr. István Ujhelyi, MEP**  
**Vice-Chair of TRAN Committee, European Parliament**

Dr. István Ujhelyi is a Member of the European Parliament and a prominent figure in Hungarian politics. With a degree in Law and Political Sciences, he has held various positions throughout his career. He has served as a Member of the Hungarian Parliament, Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, and State Secretary of different government offices.

Since 2014, Dr. Ujhelyi has been an active member of the European Parliament, representing the Hungarian S&D delegation. He holds significant roles in committees, including First Vice-Chair of the Committee on Transport and Tourism and a member of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Dr. Ujhelyi has initiated and supported numerous initiatives, including the European Health Union and the EU-China Tourism Year. He has also founded organizations such as the Confucius Institute and the think tank "European Democrats." Dr. Ujhelyi's dedication to politics, civil society, and various causes has solidified his reputation as an influential and proactive politician.



**Prof. Alessandra Priante**  
**Director, Regional Department for Europe, UNWTO**

Alessandra Priante is the Director for Europe at UNWTO, the UN agency that promotes sustainable, responsible and universally accessible tourism. She was previously the Chief of multilateral relations and tourism policy in Italy for the Ministries where tourism was positioned (Ministry of Culture and subsequently the Ministry of Agricultural, Food, Forestry policies)

She is a first-degree business graduate at Bocconi University, and holds an Executive MBA at Luiss Guido Carli University. She merged her experience in corporate finance and M&A operations with her cultural expertise, joining since 2002 the Ministry of Culture, with the task of restructuring public finances for the culture sector. As an expert of the Middle East area, she was appointed from 2010 to 2015 the Diplomatic Cultural Representative for the Gulf Area.

Alessandra knows 6 languages and is an author of numerous sector publications. She is also an adjunct Professor at Luiss Business School and teaches culture and tourism management at other major universities in Italy and abroad.



**Mr. Wang Wei (Duma)**  
**CEO, Hiseas International Tourism Group**

Mr. Wang Wei has a strong educational background in the field of business and management. They are currently pursuing a degree at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) Business School since 2019. Prior to that, he completed a Master's degree at Peking University Guanghua School of Management from 2015 to 2019, and a Bachelor's degree at Beijing International Studies University from 2000 to 2004.

In terms of work experience, he has been serving as the CEO of HiSEAS International Tourism Group since 2013. Before that, from 2008 to 2013, Mr. Wang Wei worked as the Deputy General Manager at Hiseas Sino-Europe Consultancy in Beijing. Additionally, he has held positions of responsibility in social and professional organizations, including Chief Representative in China for the Europe China OBOR Culture & Tourism Development Committee and Vice Chairman of the European Union Working Committee of China-Europe Association for Technical and Economic Cooperation.

Language: Chinese mother tongue, he speaks also English and Russian.



**Mr. Armin Ernst**  
**CEO and President, Steward Health Care**

Dr Armin Ernst is an executive physician with over 20 years of experience in health care around the world. He has extensive managerial experience in building integrated, high-performance systems and teams within large academic medical centers, ambulatory care systems, and for-profit and non-profit health care environments.

A key member of the Steward leadership team for several years, as CEO and President of Steward Health Care International, Dr Ernst has been responsible for exporting the Steward mission and vision of high value, sustainably financed and integrated health care outside of the USA and currently oversees operations in Europe and Latin America.

Steward, the largest privately-held health system in the US, has spent the last decade perfecting a highly successful, vertically and horizontally integrated health care delivery model that achieves the highest quality care, increases patient access, and substantially reduces total medical expense.



**Ms. Natalia Bayona**  
**Director, Innovation, Education and Investments,**  
**UNWTO**

Natalia Bayona is the leader of the Innovation and Digital Transformation Strategy of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Natalia Bayona holds a Bachelor's Degree in Government and International Relations from the Universidad Externado de Colombia and an Executive MBA from IE Business School. She is part of the World Economic Forum network as a European Digital Leader for IE

Business School.

She served as the Vice President of International Development for the Spain Startup – South Summit. Natalia organized the first South Summit Pacific Alliance, connecting the main stakeholders of the entrepreneurship ecosystem of Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru.



**Prof. Dr. Todorka Kostadinova**  
**Vice Rector, Medical University - Varna / Board member,**  
**European Health Management Association**

Todorka Kostadinova is a Professor at the Department of Economics and Healthcare Management at the Faculty of Public Health at Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna. She has a PhD degree in economics from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia and postdoctoral specialisations in George Washington University, Georgetown University and University of

Berkeley in the field of health policy, healthcare financing and leadership. Her main scientific interests and publications are in the field of public health, strategic management, social and health marketing, integrated care, management of international projects and programmes, team building, social entrepreneurship and innovations.

In the period 2009-2010 Prof. Kostadinova combined academic work with managerial positions at national and international level as a Deputy Minister of Health, Chair of the National Council for Food Safety, member of the Supervisory Board of the National Health Insurance Fund, member of the National Council for Citizens' Rights and Ethnic Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coordinator for Bulgaria of the South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN). She is former Vice President of the European Health Management Association, now a Member of the Board of Directors and Chair of the Special Interest Group on South-Eastern Europe.

Currently, Prof. Kostadinova is a Vice Rector for International Relations, Accreditation and Quality at the Medical University of Varna.



**Mrs. Elitza Stoilova, CEO, UMNI AI (Bulgaria)**

Elitza Stoilova is the co-founder and CEO of Umni, a platform that allows businesses to create and manage AI chatbot on their own to automate the routine questions and tasks, to save time and resources and increase sales, while giving more time to employees for quality customers service.

Elitza has over 20 years of experience in the tourism industry, up to General Manager and Director of Marketing of a hotel and a tour operator. She worked in hotels in Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco and for 17 years on Saipan, Marianas Islands. She served as a destination marketing consultant at the Marianas Visitor Authority (AdHoc, MVA) for over 10 years, and she received 2 recognitions from MVA.

Elitza co-founded Umni while participating and successfully completing the Founder Institute startup accelerator, with a focus on chatbots for hospitality. She managed the pilot project of Umni for

developing and maintaining the 1st city tourists AI chatbot in Bulgaria – Plovdiv City Concierge, for tourists of Plovdiv as European Capital of Culture'19.

Elitza is a member of SKAL, Rotary Bulgaria, and other organizations. She is recognized as an expert and a lector on topics on digitalization of SMEs and the usage of AI chatbots for business.

In March'23 Umni won the UNWTO global start-up competition for Island Destination in category Innovation and digitalization of island destinations with its Island Tourist AI Concierge project.



**Mr. Roberto Antunes**  
**Executive Director, NEST (Portugal)**

Roberto Antunes is the Executive Director of NEST, Portugal.

Owning a degree in Economics at Nova University of Lisbon and a post-graduation in Tourism Management in Estoril School, has a career of more than 20 years in multinationals in marketing roles and FMCG category leadership positions, both at local, regional a global levels.

Lived in 7 countries, Angola, Portugal, Austria, Italy, France, UK and Brazil. Since May 2019 is the executive Director of the newly established tourism innovation center, which he was invited to set up and coordinate, up until today.



**Mr. Ricardo Leitão**  
**Executive Director, Nova Medical School (Portugal)**

Ricardo Leitao, M.D., Invited Assistant Professor, Executive Director exponential medicine unit, Health and Tourism Co-Chair, NEST HaT: Health and Tourism Lab Director, NOVA Medical School, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal



**Mr. Massimo Caputi**  
**President, Federterme (Italy)**

Massimo Caputi is President of Federterme – Confindustria, the only Italian organization representing more than 300 thermal & spa companies grouped to protect wellness tourism. Cohesion improves authority in pointing out the sector's needs in the dialogue with Institutions with the aim of implementing regulations to defend categories and workers belonging to the sector. Federterme founded the Foundation for Thermal Scientific Research – FoRST specifically dedicated to the promotion of research in the field of thermal medicine.

The purpose of Eng. Massimo Caputi is to integrate prevention, treatment and rehabilitation analyzing the biological, clinical and socio-economic effects of spa therapy completing the traditional healing methods in the interest of all the actors involved: patients, the National Health System and Insurance companies.

Massimo Caputi is also owner and President of Terme di Saturnia Natural Destination and Terme Italia Group, a holding company that controls 5 already operating thermal structures, a SPA & Wellness center and several structures that will be opened in 2024. In addition, being CEO of FEIDOS Inc, Massimo Caputi operates as well in the real estate finance and asset management market, particularly in the sectors of residential real estate, senior living and leisure-hospitality, promoting and coordinating the interests



**Mrs. Polina Karastoyanova, PhD**  
**Executive Director, Bulgaria National Board of Tourism**

Dr. Polina Karastoyanova is Executive Director of the National Tourism Board Association since February 2018. Polina Karastoyanova is born in Plovdiv, graduated Economics from the University of National and World Economy and a second master's degree in Mass Communications at the New Bulgarian University. She has worked as a financial consultant of Bulgarian and international companies.

In 2006 she was among the founders of the National Tourism of Board and was elected as an executive director of the organization.

She was elected for a deputy in 43rd National Assembly. Chairman of the Committee on Culture and Media, Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Economic Policy and Tourism and Head of Delegation to the Black Sea Economic Co-operation Parliamentary Assembly in National Assembly.



### **Mr. Mike Wallace, Hot springs, medical spa and wellness expert**

For twenty-five years Michael Wallace has worked in the health and wellness industry specializing in hot spring/thermal medical spas and health tourism.

Previous roles have included Regional Manager for Livingwell Health Clubs, Group Spa Director for Danubius Hotels Group (a position he held for 18 years) and Medical Tourism Expert for the Hungarian Tourist Agency which involved promoting Hungary's health tourism facilities to external markets.

A respected international speaker and consultant in health, wellness and medical tourism industries specializing in hot spring/thermal medical spas, Michael also lectures at several universities on health tourism/spa management, contributes articles for various industry publications and is co-author of the books *The Spa Manager's Essential Guide* (Goodfellow, 2020) and *Wellness, Fitness és Egészség* (Springmed 2016).