Proposal by the Regional Commission for Europe of an “UNWTO Agenda for Europe 2030 – Tourism Leading the Change”

Executive summary

The Chair of the UNWTO Commission for Europe (CEU), Ukraine, has submitted a draft of an “Agenda for Europe 2030 – Tourism Leading the Change”, which the Secretary-General is now providing for consideration, in this complementary report, to the Executive Council and the General Assembly, under the item on the Draft Programme of Work for 2024-2025.

The initiative was first proposed by Greece in its capacity of the Chair of CEU during the 66th meeting of CEU, held in 2021, with the aim of boosting the organization of the regional activities, increasing the level of cooperation, and strengthening the collaboration with the other regions, leveraging the Members’ contributions to the Organization.

In 2023, upon the renewed initiative by Greece, CEU called upon the Secretary-General to include the final draft of the “UNWTO Agenda for Europe” in the UNWTO Programme of Work and Budget 2024-2025.

The proposed Agenda for Europe was prepared by the Working Group for the elaboration of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe, comprised of the representatives of Armenia, Cyprus, Greece (as the initiator), Lithuania, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine in its capacity of the current Chair of CEU, including consultations with the rest of the CEU Members and the Secretariat.
I. Introduction

1. Following the 69th Regional Commission for Europe held on 16 October 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in the framework of the 25th session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General transmits, in Annex I, the revised text of the “UNWTO Agenda for Europe 2030 – Tourism Leading the Change”, as submitted by the Chair of the Commission for Europe, Ukraine.

2. This proposal was also a result of the discussion within the Programme and Budget Committee during its 24th meeting held on 11 September 2023 (see document CE/119/PBC24) and was amended accordingly to the UNWTO Legal Counsel’s recommendations.

3. The “UNWTO Agenda for Europe 2030 – Tourism Leading the Change” (A4E) is a member-driven initiative rooted in the 66th meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe in 2021, under the leadership of Greece, while the tourism sector worldwide was terribly affected by the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

4. While experiencing a rebound in the recent years reaffirming the objective leadership of Europe in tourism, the ripple effects of geopolitical disruption and recent outburst of deadly conflicts, the energy crisis, inflation, high interest rates and rising costs of living are jeopardizing the stability of this recovery and putting additional burden on the tourism stakeholders across the Region.

5. Against this backdrop, the UNWTO Agenda for Europe is a crucial commitment to return value to the UNWTO members in the region of Europe.

6. The final proposal consists in allocating a percentage of 5% of the overall membership contributions of the European members collected in the previous financial year for activities specific to the region of Europe within the framework of the approved programme of work.
Annex I: Agenda for Europe 2030 – Tourism Leading the Change (as submitted by the Chair of the Regional Commission for Europe)

1. Introduction

As per the conclusion and recommendation CEU/CR/6(LXVIII), paragraphs 3-5, the Secretary-General proposed for the endorsement of the 119th session of the Executive Council and the approval of the 25th session of the UNWTO General Assembly, the “UNWTO Agenda for Europe – Tourism Leading the Change”.

The Agenda for Europe, aligned with the UNWTO Strategic Objectives and Programmatic Priorities, is the manifestation of the priorities of the members in the region of Europe, the world’s leading destination and a pioneer in tourism innovation. It aims to return value to the UNWTO members and ensure a regional focus that will benefit and address the specific needs of the members at a regional and subregional level.

Despite its prominent status, the region has faced numerous crises in the past decade, which have directly impacted the resilience, safety, and security of this tourism destination. In response to the climate change, migration crises, global pandemic, Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, with a spillover effect to most neighboring tourism markets, and the uncertain global economic situation, Europe must strengthen its policies at national and regional levels to maintain its vigour and continue to drive global tourism development.

This document is the result of a consultative process among the members in the region, initiated during the 66th meeting of the UNWTO Commission for Europe, decided during the 68th meeting of the UNWTO Commission for Europe and conducted through a regional working group for the elaboration of this document to advance the adaptability of the European tourism ecosystem to the new trends and reality that emerged in the post-pandemic era.

The Agenda for Europe seeks to spearhead the transformation for a more climate neutral, environmentally conscious, and inclusive sector. Tourism must rely on a highly skilled workforce to improve the service quality offering and seize the possibilities offered by the digitalization along the entire tourism value chain. Furthermore, it must apply the ideas of the circular economy to develop and diversify tourism offerings and essentially build a more competitive and resilient sector as the driver of economic and social development.

Climate action must be at the centre of tourism policies as an overarching priority, linked to all other areas of tourism policy. While offsetting can play a subsidiary role, the reduction of emissions is key to achieve a truly sustainable tourism of the future.

2. Rationale

Tourism is an important economic sector in Europe, which contributes generously to the GDP of the countries across the region and provides livelihoods for millions along the tourism value chain through millions of arrivals every year.

Europe is a diverse region, built at the crossroads of cultures and religions, boasting a rich cultural heritage and diverse natural features. It includes leading and emerging tourism destinations with diverse sets of needs and priorities. The political complexity of the region is further demonstrated by the numerous subregional stakeholders and policy counterparts.

Within the UNWTO, Europe is the strongest region with more than a quarter of member States and nearly 100% membership contributions honouring, repeatedly exceeding 45% of the total membership contributions collected. In terms of statutory and programmatic representation, Europe is a leader within the Organization, currently with 5 chairs and co-chairs of the various UNWTO committees and ample array of UNWTO events taking place in the region every year.
For the UNWTO Secretariat, through the Regional Department for Europe, to deliver on the vision statement of achieving the highest standards of performance in tourism policy in governance by establishing adequate contents in the UNWTO Programme of Work, it is imperative that the latter consolidates a streamlined and balanced mix of activities. This must include political analysis and research, and establish a stronger coordination between different departments, to better address the specific needs of the members of the region.

According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 21, Issue 1 (January 2023), international tourism reached 63% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022, driven by a strong demand and the lifting of travel restrictions around the world. Europe welcomed 585 million arrivals in 2022, almost 80% of the 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.

The following issue (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 21, Issue 2 – May 2023) reveals that during the first quarter of 2023, international tourist arrivals in Europe, the world’s largest destination region, reached 90% of pre-pandemic levels. By subregions, Southern Mediterranean Europe recovered its pre-pandemic levels and Northern Europe (91%) came very close to their 2019 levels.

According to the recent Spring 2023 Economic Forecast, 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, under the ripple effects of geopolitical disruption, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the energy crisis, inflation, high interest rates and rising costs of living, as tourism is recovering, challenges also emerge for accelerating sustainable consumption and production patterns and focusing on catalytic interventions in the fields of high importance, such as the climate action. Various parts of Europe are particularly suffering from the devastating consequences of climate change, such as floods, wildfires, record high temperatures and other climate-related situations, including increasingly unreliable snow conditions, that have a significant impact on tourism and demonstrate the inter-dependence between tourism and the natural environment.

Against this backdrop, the UNWTO Agenda for Europe is a crucial commitment to return value to the UNWTO members in the region of Europe by reinforcing the regionally most relevant areas of the UNWTO Programme of Work.
3. Structure

The UNWTO Agenda for Europe aims to ensure strategic guidance and an actionable plan for an efficient management of the tourism sector across the region. It shall be aligned with the priorities set out in the UNWTO Programme of Work, identified through previously established consultative processes with the members, and shall amplify the most relevant areas of work, thereby addressing the specific needs of the members in the region by:

– addressing the impact of climate change, including natural disasters, and economic volatility on tourism in Europe, mitigating the consequences and increasing resilience of the tourism sector in Europe;
– assessing the impact of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine on tourism in Europe, developing and implementing measures to overcome the consequences of military aggressions and civil unrests and restore tourism in the region, with a special focus on Ukraine, neighbouring countries and countries bordering Russia but not excluding any other territory harmed by existing or potential future conflicts arising in the region;
– implementing projects that benefit European members directly through knowledge creation, events, and resource mobilization, open for collaboration with and participation of other UNWTO regions to ensure wider relevance and benefits;
– enhancing multilateral cooperation and opportunities as well as synergies within the UNWTO and with European and other regional institutions and the European Travel Commission;
– supporting less privileged areas of the region to address market challenges and increase competitiveness.

During the first biennium and in line with the UNWTO Programme of Work 2024-2025, the Agenda for Europe shall reinforce the activities corresponding to the five programmatic priorities, including but not limited to:

1. **Sustainability and inclusiveness**: peace and security, climate action and other measures for mitigating the impact of environmental hazards on tourism, resilience, accessibility for all, women empowerment, youth empowerment.
2. **Education and training**: workforce development to increase service quality, advancing green and digital skills, reskilling and upskilling to attract and retain talent;
3. **Competitiveness**: product and destination development, certification and labelling;
4. **Investments and innovation**: digitalization, improving infrastructure, promoting entrepreneurial opportunities;
5. **Tourism policy and governance**: human resources management, promoting autonomy in decision-making processes, short-term rentals, standardisation.

To support the implementation of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe, 5% of the overall membership contributions of the European members collected in the previous financial year must be allocated each year from the UNWTO Regular Budget to the Regional Department for Europe for the implementation of the Agenda for Europe, in addition to the regular budget of the said department. This does not entail an increase in membership contributions or other additional unintentional payments.

Further supplementary resources shall be mobilized through voluntary contributions of the members, cooperation with intergovernmental organizations, including concerted action with the institutions of the European Union and with international financial institutions, as well as through collaboration with the private sector and by attracting new members.

4. Outcomes and deliverables

Subject to approval, according to the governance structure outlined in the following section, Member States in the region propose the following non-exhaustive list of concrete outcomes and deliverables for 2024-2025:
- continuation of the **UNWTO Practicum**, focusing on the topic of relevance for the region Europe, including climate action and digital skills;
- Europe-centred **data on tourism trends**, particularly data related to the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on tourism in Europe;
- **specific training** related to peace, security and investments for post-war tourism recovery;
- **research and publication** on climate action in tourism in Europe.

5. **Governance**

Through specific Rules of Procedure, developed by the Secretary-General and adopted by the UNWTO Commission for Europe, a Working Group shall be established, comprised of a maximum of seven (7) members from the region of Europe:

- **Chair (1)** of the UNWTO Commission for Europe, who shall also act as Chair of the Working Group,
- One (1) or two (2) members of the UNWTO Programme and Budget Committee (PBC),
- Four (4) other members, in the case of two (2) PBC members, or five (5) other members, in the case of one (1) PBC member, elected by the Commission for Europe for a non-renewable term of 2 years.

The Working Group shall:

- in agreement with the Secretary-General, identify the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the implementation of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe, to be endorsed by the PBC and approved by the Executive Council,
- with the support of the Regional Department for Europe, elaborate the Workplans of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe and present them to the UNWTO Commission for Europe for endorsement by the PBC and to the Executive Council for approval,
- review periodic operational reports,
- report to the UNWTO Commission for Europe on the results of the implementation of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe.

The strategic framework of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe shall be in conformity with the UNWTO Strategic Objectives and Programmatic Priorities. As such it shall be included in the biennial UNWTO Programme of Work which the Secretary-General drafts and submits for examination by the Executive Council and ultimately approval by the General Assembly.

Meetings of the Working Group shall be convened by the Chair of the UNWTO Commission for Europe at least three (3) times per year, either in-person or virtually.

The implementation of the UNWTO Agenda for Europe shall be entrusted to the Regional Department for Europe within the UNWTO Secretariat, following the existing legal framework of the Organization.

Under the supervision of the Secretary-General, the Regional Department for Europe shall:
- act as the Secretariat of the Working Group,
- support the Working Group in elaborating the Workplan,
- provide operational support for the implementation of the Workplan,
- prepare periodic operational reports for the review of the Working Group,
- seek external partnerships to support the implementation of the Workplan.