Agenda item 2: Communication of the Chair

Esteemed Secretary-General,

Distinguished Vice-Chairs,

Dear colleagues,

As the Chair of the Commission for Europe of the UN Tourism on behalf of Ukraine, I welcome all member countries to the 70th meeting of the Commission for Europe in sunny Tirana.

We are honored to gather in Albania, in a city with such a rich history and development path, to discuss important issues and come together to promote tourism.

Taking this opportunity, I express my deep gratitude to Minister Mirela Kumbaro for the excellent organization and hospitality extended to all delegations in Albania.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Secretary-General of the UN Tourism, Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, for your unwavering support of Ukraine during the ongoing full-scale invasion by Russia. We are delighted to be part of the UN Tourism initiatives and to participate in world-class events that enable tourism to take a leading position in the economic development of countries.

Please allow me also to thank the Regional Department of Europe for their constant support to members, dedication to the cause, and readiness to assist 24 hours a day. Ukraine is ready to continue productive cooperation and development.

I would also like to thank the Working Group for their fruitful cooperation and achievements.

According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex released in January 2024: An estimated 1,286 million international tourists (overnight visitors) were recorded around the world in 2023, an increase of 34% over 2022.

International tourism recovered 88% of pre-pandemic levels, supported by strong pent-up demand.

The Middle East led the recovery by regions in relative terms, being the only region to overcome pre-pandemic levels with arrivals 22% above 2019.

Europe reached 94% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, while Africa recovered 96% and the Americas 90%.

Asia and the Pacific reached 65% of pre-pandemic levels, with a gradual recovery since the start of 2023.

Four subregions: North Africa, Central America (both +5%), Southern Mediterranean Europe, and the Caribbean (both +1%) exceeded pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

Total export revenues from tourism (including passenger transport) are estimated at USD 1.6 trillion in 2023, almost 95% of the USD 1.7 trillion recorded in 2019.

Preliminary estimates of tourism direct gross domestic product (TDGDP) point to USD 3.3 trillion in 2023, or 3% of global GDP, the same level as in 2019, driven by both domestic and international travel.

According to the priorities outlined in the HOTREC strategy, the tourism and hospitality ecosystem must continue its journey toward greater resilience, sustainability, and digitalization.

It should be emphasized that the hospitality industry is on the path to recovery, with some European regions already surpassing pre-pandemic guest numbers. Nevertheless, new risks have emerged – such as the continued struggle against inflation, the energy crisis, labor shortages, environmental
disasters, and geopolitical tensions – which are impeding the sector's full comeback.

The tourism industry is a vital part of the European economy and accounts for 10% of its GDP.

One of the greatest challenges facing the hospitality industry is addressing skills and labor shortages. According to statistics from HOTREC, the European hospitality industry promotes youth employment, as 41% of workers in this sector are under 35 years old. Additionally, 53.4% of those working in hospitality are women.

In my opinion, it is important to support educational and internship programs for tourism industry workers, as well as diverse forms of employment, including part-time and temporary work, as they are key to creating jobs and promoting economic growth.

One important stage of development is the digitalization of the tourism industry. Businesses should have equal rights and opportunities to use online platforms. It is crucial to build open relationships with business partners. The digitalization of registration, payment, data exchange, statistics, and VAT automation will streamline service delivery and enable us to see a real picture of tourism. By analyzing the collected data, we will be able to predict tourism flows and address the challenges facing the industry.

The escalating threats of climate change and environmental degradation pose an existential threat to the world. Natural disasters like wildfires, floods, heat waves, and unusual weather patterns have, in recent decades, severely impacted hospitality businesses. Thus, we support the European Green Deal's objectives, aiming to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, capable of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions.

Tourism around the world has undergone significant changes following the Covid-19 pandemic. A new market has emerged in the European region - South Korea, while China, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, and the USA remain among the priority markets.

It is worth mentioning that according to surveys conducted by the ETC, travelers worldwide pay attention to the following factors when choosing vacation destinations: affordability-focused markets, climate-driven, preservation-oriented, and short trips. Tourists from China are willing to spend over 200 euros per day.

Travelers from Japan, Brazil, and South Korea are avid culture and heritage enthusiasts who will prioritize experiences enabling them to learn about the historical richness of Europe, attend cultural events, and engage with local traditions.

Japan and South Korea represent markets where culinary exploration is a key driver for visiting Europe. These individuals will take pleasure in discovering local cuisines, seeking out unique dining experiences, and embracing the gastronomic diversity each destination has to offer.

Respondents from Australia, Canada, and Japan display a notable inclination towards slow travel in Europe. They will value a more leisurely pace, savoring each moment and fostering connections with local communities.

South Koreans and Americans, more than travelers in other markets, are drawn to luxury shopping experiences. During their next visit to Europe, they are more likely to make luxury shopping a significant aspect of their itineraries, enjoying high-end retail districts, designer boutiques, and exclusive shopping destinations.

European destinations that offer safety, iconic attractions, and well-established facilities are expected to attract overseas travelers during 2024.

The war that Russia brought to our land forced us to become more flexible and rethink our priorities. Today, we have focused a large part of our efforts on international activities. The entire European region has felt the impact of the war, especially the countries adjacent to us.

The Ukrainian tourist market is not only trying to survive but has also skillfully adapted to the crisis. Analytics show active growth in domestic tourism and the active development of tourist locations in the central and western regions of the country. The forced pause in the development of many tourist
destinations has allowed us to structure and systematize Ukrainian tourism.

The most important thing we are doing right now is helping local communities across the country become self-sufficient and find their unique path to tourism development. Each region and location in Ukraine is unique, and their tourism offerings should be just as unique.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the number of people with disabilities in Ukraine has exceeded 300,000, with over 70,000 of them being military personnel. Therefore, we must adapt the tourism environment to the needs of people with disabilities. We are doing everything possible to make tourism accessible without barriers.

The world needs to embrace the philosophy of accessibility and promote an inclusive environment around us.

According to the agenda, I would like to emphasize the importance of adopting the Rules of Procedure of the Working Group for the Agenda for Europe, as well as the Selection Criteria and Key Performance Indicators for the evaluation of the projects supported through the Agenda for Europe.

As I mentioned before, the challenges we face have been outlined in The Agenda for Europe. Only by working together can we preserve tourism as a driving force for economic development, protect cultural heritage, pass on traditions, and reveal the incredible corners of our continent.

I am confident that we all want to move forward and implement The Agenda for Europe, a document designed to promote the adaptability of the European tourism ecosystem to new trends and realities. The Agenda for Europe aims to lead the transformation towards a more climate-neutral, environmentally conscious, and inclusive sector.

I wish us all a productive day of work! I would like to express my hope that we can all together hold a meeting of the European Commission in Ukraine in the future. I hope that such an opportunity will arise soon. Ukraine has a unique culture where the modern history of Europe is being written today.

Conclusions and Recommendations CEU/CR/4 (LXX)\(^1\)

The Commission for Europe,

- Having heard the Communication of the Chair, delivered by Ms. Mariana Oleskiv, Chair of the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine,
- Recalling conclusions and recommendations CEU/CR/2 (LXIX),

1. Shows appreciation to the Chair of the Commission for Europe for delivering the communication of the Chair;
2. Commends the Government of Ukraine for their leadership and commitment to the work of the Organization and in particular the Commission for Europe;
3. Acknowledges the work carried out by Ukraine as the Chair of the Working Group for the Agenda for Europe;
4. Notes with regret the continued effects that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has on tourism across the country and its wider region;
5. Reaffirms a stance in support of Ukraine and its people as they confront Russia’s continued war of aggression.

\(^1\) This is a draft of the conclusions and recommendations for the corresponding agenda item. For the final text adopted by the Commission, please refer to the Conclusions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.