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### Communication of the Chair

#### **Message of the Chair of the UNWTO Executive Council, Honourable Maria Grapini, Minister for Tourism, Romania**

Your Excellency, Mr. Secretary-General,  
Dear Members of the Executive Council,  
Honoured host country,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin my speech by conveying my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Serbia for its support and generosity granted to the World Tourism Organization and to its members in hosting the 95<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Council in this beautiful city situated at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers.

Also, allow me to acknowledge the commendable efforts in preparing and organizing this important event: my deep appreciation goes to the Mayor of Belgrade City, as well as to the team of the Serbian Ministry of National Development, whose valuable contribution has ensured an excellent climate of hospitality for the present delegations.

Before briefly presenting you some of the most important initiatives and projects on the Romanian agenda as Chair of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization, I would like to address special thanks to the Secretariat of the World Tourism Organization, personally to Secretary-General Taleb Rifai for the permanent support and excellent cooperation, without which we would not have been able to successfully fulfil the mandate entrusted to us.

**Romania** is aware of the major role of tourism, of its important impact on the economic recovery and growth, and the high potential of this industry in the global economy. In this regard, I obviously have in mind the two *key forces*, *globalization* and *technology*, which are transforming the tourism sector into one of the most dynamic areas of the current civilization.

We consider that, during our Chairmanship of the Executive Council, in close cooperation with the other members of the UNWTO and the Secretary-General of the Organization, we have developed and strengthened or we will initiate a series of major projects of interest for the Organization.



Therefore, we do believe that we are well prepared to assume a new mandate within the Executive Council of the UNWTO for the period 2013-2017 and we hope that the positive vote of the Regional Commission for Europe members will confirm, at the end of August, the confidence already granted to our country regarding the management of the Organization's agenda.

In this context, we wish to point out a series of ongoing actions/initiatives or planned for the period 2014-2017, whose main objectives are the increase of competitiveness and a sustainable development of tourism:

- Continue to support the campaign "Global Leaders for Tourism", which aims for a better positioning of this sector within the global economy;
- **Support for implementing the provisions of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism** – an important document for the development of a responsible and sustainable tourism – by the main actors of the tourism industry;
- Intensification of the collaboration between UNWTO and other regional and international organizations in the field, in order to **accomplish a better coordination between the UNWTO projects and other developed initiatives**, for example, at the level of European Union, European Commission for Tourism;

In this context, I would like to emphasize the importance of strengthening and deepening the cooperation with the European Commission on the assistance offered to the tourists in case of emergency - natural disasters, extreme weather (snowfalls, floods), strikes, as well as regarding the convention on the protection of consumers and of tourism service providers.

- Development of new projects of the World Tourism Organization regarding **the need to improve tourism offerings**, by focusing on the fulfilment of criteria related to **ethics, sustainability, competitiveness, environmental protection**;

**If you allow me a brief comment: Romania is currently among the first countries which has developed a recognition system for ecotourism destinations based on the European Ecotourism Labelling System (EETLS), the first system globally recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in September 2012.**

- Identification of those fields where it is necessary to achieve a better cooperation, both regionally and globally, respectively regarding the **infrastructure development, as well as the education/training of personnel**, elements absolutely vital for tourism development and promotion;
- Development of new strategies/projects to allow **the tourism sector's integration in the electronic commerce field**; in the same context, the need to promote new initiatives to raise awareness on new technologies, the Internet and social networks, fields that are crucial, including in terms of sustainable tourism development;
- Commissioning new studies related to the **identification of risks for the tourism industry related to climate change, biodiversity**;
- Exploring the possibility to develop common activities by the UNWTO Member States on the occasion of major events, especially sport events (for example, the Olympic Games);

- **Involvement of my country in an extremely important project, not only regionally but also at the European level, the management of the priority area “Promotion of Culture, Tourism and Contacts between People” within the Danube Strategy of the European Union, along with the colleagues from Ministry of Culture and our Bulgarian partners;**

In this respect, we consider that the countries and regions which will succeed in **establishing internationally strategic alliances in the tourism field**, at the regional or global level, **will be able to better value the competitive advantages and, why not, to jointly develop new touristic products.** And Europe is in a privileged position in this respect, we hope that through a better harmonization of all new or ongoing tourism projects (e.g., within the EU as a first stage,) we will cooperate better in the following fields in order to strengthen the “Europe brand” and our image worldwide:

- Investments in ecotourism development
- Diversification of the touristic offer by creating thematic products, common at the Union level, and why not, a common brand for the continent
- Development of the new technologies and implicitly improving the training of those involved in the hospitality industry, increase of the competitiveness and of the services quality, a better understanding of the consumer behaviour
- Extending the touristic season

We fully understand the importance of creating an appropriate framework that could foster the tourism development by adopting measures to facilitate travel, consumer protection, relaxation of visa regimes, given that, as recently mentioned by Mr. Taleb Rifai, **tourism is no longer a luxury, practically it may be included in the “basic human rights” category.** Therefore, **we intend, at the national level in a first stage, then hopefully even at the European level,** to initiate a series of specific programs, action plans and activities regarding **the relaxation of the visa regime**, thus addressing several concerns expressed within UNWTO on the fact that Europe is the continent which imposes the highest restrictions regarding tourism visas.

I would not like to conclude before emphasizing another way in which we plan to mark our Chairmanship of the Executive Council, namely **the organization, under the patronage of the UNWTO, of an international conference regarding the importance of identifying the competitive advantages of a touristic destination**, in the context of tourism sustainable development. **The event will take place from 3 to 5 July 2013 in Bucharest and in the Danube Delta, and in the margins of the conference a special ceremony is to be held: the signing of the Bucharest Declaration of Romanian Tourism Associations Commitment to the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics.**

Last year we hosted two international events under the patronage of the UNWTO (International Conference on Health Tourism and a workshop on how to develop a possible harmonized monitoring system for tourism in the Danube Region.), we will organize the previously mentioned event and **also, we are studying the possibility of hosting, in the medium term, an important event of UNWTO, the Executive Council or Regional Commission for Europe sessions.**

Looking forward to welcoming you in my country, it is my privilege to invite all of you to the upcoming international conference this July.

Thank you very much for your attention.