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COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION (CROATIA)

COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Minister Dostalova, dear Secretary-General, my colleagues Vice-Chairs, dear colleagues and friends

Welcome to Prague, this “golden” city on the banks of the Vltava river, the city of Charles the Fourth and Vaclav Havel alike, of Smetana and Dvorak, of Alphonse Mucha and the famous film Studios... we could go on listing bountiful examples that illustrate the rich, versatile and cultured history of this beautiful city that has welcomed us so warmly.

Coming here after 10 years when the forty-eight Commission for Europe was also held in Prague-only brings nice memories. It goes without saying that such a destination attracts tourists from all over the world all year around-the goal many of us would like to achieve.

Tourism in Europe, as we could have read in many UNWTO reports, and will surely hear the latest data from the Secretary-General's report a bit later, is still making up half of the global tourism with a promising growth trend for this year, following an extraordinary growth of 7% in 2017 with 671 million of foreign tourist arrivals. However, other regions are developing rapidly with, sometimes, better performance in tourism receipts.

The Priorities and Management Vision, presented at the 108th session of the Executive Council in San Sebastian in May, pointing to the needs for innovation and digital transformation, investment and entrepreneurship and, especially, more attention to be given to education as a key element in creativity and quality of the tourism offer, are definitely well detected areas asking for more dedicated interventions in tourism and hospitality. Many countries and regions are moving fast ahead and Europe has to make sure not to lag behind the fast growing, emerging markets with fresh ideas and eagerness to “conquer” the global tourism market.

At the same time, one must make sure that digitalization, very often welcomed as a supreme tool in promotion, sales and easiness of access, does not destroy the human fabric of tourism as a primarily social activity with, of course, respectable economic benefits. Our destinations, products and services, must continue to have the human “stamp”. Tourism should remain the people's sector, offering opportunities for employment to the local population. At the same time, the people employed in tourism and hospitality should be assisted in the transition to the digital era, as the jobs in our sector should not be lost but rather risen to a higher level with the help of IT.

This brings us to an ever-important aspect of all development, so important to tourism: sustainability. It was celebrated and promoted specifically by tourism last year during the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The ideas promoted, actions undertaken should continue to be our guiding light also in the years to come. The brochure on the Responsible Traveller should be given to every tourist, local community and tourism business, we should indeed: *Travel.Enjoy.Respect!*

In order to reach those noble goals a lot of awareness raising, mobilization and changes in policies and business practices still need to be undertaken.

Making our tourism smarter, more inclusive while maintaining its competitiveness -is our common goal. We expect UNWTO under the new leadership to continue assisting its Member States in their endeavours to position tourism higher in the national, regional and international agendas, provide guidance and, occasionally, fit to purpose specific advice and services. On this note- allow me thank the

dedicated staff or our Regional Commission for their readiness to support us at any time and-with any questions we might have!

The Region of Europe is a strong UNWTO region. However, Europe is still larger than our membership, the efforts to attract them, as our members, must continue.

Another element to make regions stronger is missing - there is no mention of regional commissions in the Statutes of the World Tourism Organization! When we approached you with our candidacy, we suggested starting working on updating the legal framework of our Organization. Once we put our heads together, I am sure we can make it happen!

The proposal to share the contacts of national focal points for sharing information, good practices and asking questions has already borne fruit-our colleagues from Azerbaijan have approached us and they received replies from a number of countries to the posed questions.

We are still working on contacting the elected representatives of CEU to different committees and working bodies of UNWTO for a more frequent exchange of information and proposals to make them truly OUR representatives.

Hopefully, through the full cooperation of the Chair, the Vice-Chairs and all the CEU members, including the Secretariat, we can further improve the work of our Commission and UNWTO as a whole, confirming its position as the leading agency when it comes to tourism.

I would like to use this opportunity and thank all of you who have responded to our letter with the proposed areas of cooperation, and the reactions were positive.

Allow me also to thank our hosts once again for their great hospitality and see you, I sincerely hope, next year in Croatia!

Thank you!