

Written Contribution for the European Tourism Convention by Parliamentary State Secretary Thomas Bareiß, MdB, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy:

Over the past ten years, tourism has been a driver of growth. Before the crisis, more than 12 per cent of people in Europe depended on tourism for their livelihoods, and around 10 per cent of the EU's gross domestic product was generated directly and indirectly by this sector. Now European tourism is facing its worst crisis ever: businesses of all sizes are facing acute liquidity difficulties, whether hotels or restaurants, tour operators or travel agencies, airlines or other passenger transport companies.

A major challenge in the next few years will be to revive people's desire to travel in the EU. A key factor here is building confidence in the safety of travel destinations and routes. In this context, it is important that the EU takes as uniform an approach as possible and strengthens its coordination of travel restrictions and quarantine measures. The German Presidency is working towards this.

All the measures taken need to comply with the principles of proportionality and non-discrimination. Free movement of persons is a valuable asset of the EU that must be preserved. Our efforts therefore remain focused on reducing travel restrictions to a minimum. In particular, we must avoid closing borders within Europe. If we do this, we will gradually achieve a new normality.

Given the acute crisis in the tourism sector, we must also take long-term measures to stabilise this sector.

The EU institutions have responded quickly and have mobilised the available instruments to help businesses and safeguard jobs. For the period up to 2027, EU leaders have put in place a framework to rebuild and improve resilience to help bolster the European economy. The tourism industry will also be able to benefit from this.

I am confident that we can use the crisis as an opportunity to make the sector more sustainable and resilient and thus make it fit for the future.

In my view, a number of factors are of particular importance in this work:

...

- We need a framework for the EU tourism industry that is unbureaucratic and competition-neutral. The European tourism industry needs to have the necessary scope to enable itself to remain innovative and competitive. A key factor is ensuring an efficient regulatory environment that imposes the fewest bureaucratic burdens possible. Tourism policy extends into a wide range of areas that affect European regulations and national ones in particular. It is important to reduce bureaucracy and investment barriers in all areas in order to expand entrepreneurial freedom. We need fewer regulations, the lowest possible burden of taxes and charges, and flexible labour markets.
- Another important field is digitalisation. In tourism especially, digitalisation is changing consumer behaviour, business models and processes, which also alters the competitive environment. Many areas of tourism have now been digitalised at least in part. There is still untapped potential in certain areas. The potential of 'Tourism 4.0' needs to be recognised and further strengthened. The EU's new instrument 'Next Generation EU' can provide a further boost in this regard. Small and medium-sized enterprises and tourist destinations all need to be able to hold their own in a global environment that features an increasing number of digital players. We therefore need to pay particular attention to ensuring fair competitive conditions. At the same time, there will continue to be areas which have not been digitised. For many people, engaging in traditional types of personal contact is still important. They like to go to travel agencies, appreciate personal contact in hotels, restaurants and theme parks, and reach for a travel guide rather than a smartphone. For the tourism industry, it is important to offer a variety of services – both digital and analogue.
- Finally, an increasing importance is being placed on making tourism more sustainable. Tourism depends, more than any other economic sector, on the preservation of the environment and authentic culture. Sustainable tourism development helps to preserve natural and cultural surroundings that offer a good quality of life, to protect the environment and to mitigate climate change. This kind of tourism is in unison with nature, the landscape and the interests of the local population and therefore enables value to be created long term. At the same time, the revival of tourism will also go hand-in-hand with increased traffic flows.

Solutions are needed that are both smart and economic in order to limit the resulting effects on the climate, the environment and health. In the field of energy policy, there are already many solutions and innovations that are playing a role in this. We are on the right track here.

We are all facing the major challenge of preserving established and proven tourism structures. We need to allow structural change to take place whilst also ensuring that healthy businesses survive this crisis and the incomes and jobs of millions of people are safeguarded. To make this work in the long term, the tourism industry needs stability and planning security. It is therefore important that we engage in dialogue at EU-level to help ensure that these are in place. I am confident that tourism will emerge stronger from the current crisis and that this will also set the stage for robust development in the sector over the next 10 to 20 years.