

Statement of Elisabeth KÖSTINGER, Federal Minister of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism European Tourism Convention, 12 October 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an exceptional shock for our economies, societies and lives. Tourism – one of the most dynamic and interconnected sectors – is affected to an unprecedented scope. It is, therefore, imperative that we take all necessary and available measures on European and national level to support the tourism sector, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, during the crisis and beyond, ensuring a swift and comprehensive recovery.

At the same time, we must pursue the long-term objective of making tourism more innovative, resilient and sustainable, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, I thank Commissioner Thierry Breton and the Commission Services for taking the initiative to organise the European Tourism Convention and laying the foundations for shaping together the European tourism of tomorrow.

The ecosystem-based approach by the European Commission is particularly suitable for tourism due to its comprehensive value chains, the combined use of public and private resources and the dependence of all stakeholders on the overall functioning of the system. This has become even more obvious during the current COVID-19 crisis. A whole-of-government approach and also integrating all levels – European, national, regional and local – is required to create successful tourism ecosystems.

In 2019, Austria presented its national tourism strategy “Plan T – Masterplan for Tourism”. Since then the situation in the previously flourishing tourism sector has drastically changed and many tourism businesses struggle to survive. Bearing this in mind, we have introduced a comprehensive package of support measures including guarantees, subsidies, short-time work and tax relief and we will continue to do so acknowledging new challenges deriving from the crisis. At the same time, the future-oriented “Plan T” will guide us throughout the implementation of the Austrian Government’s tourism policy.

With regard to the challenges and investment priorities, in my view **the European tourism of tomorrow needs to be a:**

➤ **Tourism that is in line with green transition**

Environmental necessity, but also changing values of tourists require a “green” realignment of tourism. This includes rethinking mobility patterns and modes of transport and, in consequence, support for sustainable mobility and improved transnational connectivity incorporating new trends such as *train & bike*. Tourism enterprises should be supported in their efforts to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. We must also better inform the sector and its workforce of the possibilities to improve circular economy in tourism, reduce waste (e.g. food) and the use of plastic. Awareness amongst travellers must be raised concerning the effects of their behaviour and travel habits.

➤ **Tourism that creates and respects high-quality living environments for the local population as well as for guests**

Every region – cities or rural areas – has its strengths, its big and small particularities and its talents. If tourism should develop its full potential for wellbeing and wealth of the population, we need a holistic approach, a structured cooperation and an embedding of tourism in regional development strategies: transport, land-use planning, energy supply and digital infrastructure; but also cooperation with agriculture, culture, creative industries and crafts to enrich the tourism product. The overall objective must be to focus on quality, not quantity - even though this might differ according to the particular area and the particular moment in time. Only then, can we make the best use of regional value chains and enable tourism to be a pioneer in sustainable regional development.

➤ **Tourism that is based on traditional European (small scale) structures**

Small and medium-sized enterprises, and in particular, family businesses with regional bonds are the cornerstones of tourism in Austria and many other countries. We need to take care of these traditional structures by providing an adequate regulatory framework, cutting red tape and guarantee a level-playing field, while implementing the “think-small first” principle. Rules and regulations should be abolished, if they no longer prove to be fit for purpose.

➤ **Tourism that is attractive for the future workforce**

While we have to respect certain basic circumstances (e.g. productivity-related limits to the level of income; working time – daily peaks, evening, weekends), we need to make sure that innovative offers, appropriate framework conditions and communication on the positive aspects of working in tourism (contact to people, work where others make holidays, etc.) contribute to the attractiveness of the sector as an employer. We should continue state-of-the-art education and training in tourism in close cooperation with the sector, including green and digital skills.

➤ **Tourism that is innovative and smart**

Tourism requires continuous product and process innovation to respond to market developments. Data are key in this regard. Never in our history before have we had such an abundance of data. It is, therefore, crucial that we optimise its use for our purposes: better and faster information about the offer, customer preferences and tourism flows; more efficient management of processes in enterprises and destinations; and better use of platforms and digital solutions to learn (from each other). This requires both the improvement of tourism data and the best possible integration of non-tourism specific data sources to establish a comprehensive basis for informed policy decision-making.

➤ **Tourism that provides a safe and seamless travel experience**

We need to facilitate travelling as much as possible, and to achieve this, strong policy coordination between tourism, transportation, health, security and other relevant authorities. New digital tools can help in this regard, but at the same time, we must not forget privacy and data protection.

We should strive to support these priorities to the maximum extent possible with adequate investments, the generation and use of knowledge and efficient horizontal and vertical coordination to ensure that the European tourism ecosystem will be more innovative, more resilient and more sustainable in the future.