



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Minister of Tourism

Written Statement by the Bulgarian Minister of Tourism regarding challenges for European tourism in the next 10-20 years and investment priorities necessary for the sustainable recovery of the EU tourism ecosystem

Tourism is among the most affected sectors by the crisis with COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN WTO) estimates a loss of 850 million to 1.1 billion international tourist arrivals, \$910 million to \$1.1 trillion in export revenues and 100-120 million jobs, depending on different factors associated with the development of the crisis. In Bulgaria as per official data, the reduction in visits by foreign tourists is nearly 70% for the period January - July 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to rethink the tourism system for a more sustainable and resilient future. Policy intervention will be necessary to advance key priorities, such as encouraging new business models, embracing digitalisation and promoting connectivity.

Rebuilding destinations and the tourism system is key priority. Support and recovery measures need to be comprehensive across the sector branches that make up the tourism experience. Accessibility, connectivity and transport should be high on the agenda just as accommodations, restaurants, resorts, tour operators, events, travel association and travel tech companies.

Innovating and investing in tourism will need to be enhanced. The sector should be ready to resume and keep on innovating and transforming. Moreover, investments will be needed to make structural and physical changes to address health requirements and visitors expectations in the first phase of recovery and in the long term. Measures to support innovation in SMEs to ensure stronger long term economic resilience are



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Minister of Tourism

also needed. Tourism businesses and destinations will also need to adjust their offer to respond to changed travel behaviours.

Addressing these and other multi-faceted challenges faced by the tourism industry, including the infrastructure and skills needed to meet expected future demand, requires an integrated approach, with input and support from industry and the research community. Long-term strategies and policies focused on promoting quality employment and job creation, skills development, entrepreneurship, innovation, effective investment, and integrated regional development, are integral to achieving sustainable and inclusive tourism growth – growth that takes into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, and addresses the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host community.

Various priority areas across the value chain in tourism are important such as: Policy formulation and implementation, Market access and facilitating travel, Marketing and promotion of the destination, Provision of necessary infrastructure, Setting and regulating standards, including quality and safety.

The key themes that are seen as priorities in the tourism sector are increasing competitiveness while also pursuing the sustainability of the sector. Important issues for the recovery of the sector include improving the quality of infrastructure, facilities and services, as well as the distinctiveness as a tourism destination. Also decisive factor is the need to improve the conditions for investment and growth and to support innovation. Another aspect is the need to address seasonality of demand – increasing tourism in the off-season, as well as spreading tourism geographically – encouraging development and spending in areas of high potential. Addressing labour supply shortages and increasing levels of skills and training both represent challenges that



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Minister of Tourism

should be tackled. Target should also be at attracting new source markets and meeting their needs, improving transport and connectivity.

In Bulgaria priorities are concentrated on developing the country as an year-round tourist destination with rich historical and cultural tourism, spa-tourism, wine and culinary tourism.

Investments need to follow these priorities. Optimization of business processes and digitalization will be extremely important. Tourism needs to find an increasingly active place, being promoted alongside major cultural events such as concerts, or major sporting events.

The customer must continue to be the most important part of the business. Developing flexible promotional products, organizing various events and initiatives, prizes and all kinds of competitions like quizzes that bring together tourism and culture, for example, is a great incentive to engage the communities within the EU.

The countries need to cooperate more on a cultural basis. New and new routes need to be used to enrich the programme for the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. In the current reality, the importance of such platforms is increasing.

Mariyana Nikolova