



30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Professor Thierry Breton  
Commissioner Internal Markets  
European Commission

**European Tourism Convention, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

Commissioner Breton,

on behalf of Malta, I would like to thank the European Commission for organising the Informal Tourism Convention, which is a first of its kind and will pave the way for the future of such a pivotal industry. Through this Convention we will have the opportunity to exchange ideas on our immediate and future challenges of the European tourism industry and the main investment priorities. These are necessary for the EU's ongoing effort towards a roadmap on sustainable, innovative, and resilient European tourism ecosystem – European Agenda for Tourism 2050.

In my view, recouping tourism volumes is the most immediate challenge for the European tourism industry. It will be difficult to implement future plans unless this challenge is immediately addressed. In the absence of a COVID-19 vaccine, as Governments, we need to improve our coordination efforts with the aim of limiting the use of mandatory quarantine restrictions. In eliminating mandatory quarantine restrictions, we will be safeguarding the fundamental right of free movement within the EU and giving a measure of security and predictability, which is so necessary to the industry during this period of uncertainty.

If we are to succeed in our coordination efforts, common procedures and criteria need to be urgently agreed upon by all of us. Domestic tourism is being proposed as an alternative source of business for the tourism and hospitality sectors. This alternative is not without its limitations, especially in the case of island Member States. We strongly believe that domestic travel needs to be understood, to refer to travel throughout the territory of the internal market, and accordingly extended. COVID-19-proof intra-European travel should be nurtured and encouraged as an interim step prior to the eventual return to normality.

The sustainability of the tourism industry is one of Europe's greatest challenges for the future. Plans have indeed been drafted. More importantly, however, they need to be implemented if we are to reach our ambitions. By way of example, improvements in technology are a key element of Europe's commitment towards becoming climate neutral by 2050. In this respect,



whilst noting Europe's commitment towards investment in innovation and R & D, we should also ensure that the allocated funds are utilised. In working towards these ambitions, I once again advise caution against any measures that might burden the sector with increased costs, which measures can also limit our connectivity and competitiveness as a European destination. Presently there are also limitations in the EU's competition policy which restrict Member States from contributing towards green investments undertaken by companies with public funds. The use of advanced digital technologies, such as Artificial intelligence, can also contribute towards addressing the challenges of the industry. Soon, digital technologies will be able to provide tailor-made tourism products, which will cater for every aspect of the touristic experience from the point of booking to the eventual return home.

Another challenge to the European Tourism industry is the growing competition from third country destinations. Our tourists are seeking novelty in their travel experiences and this is pushing them away from Europe. We must address this by investing in our human resources, which have been our best asset, through the reskilling and upskilling of the tourism workforce. Also, crucial is the enhancement of Europe's tourism product through the preservation of Europe's history and cultural heritage. Apart from further developing our tourism offer in a sustainable manner, we will also be safeguarding our European identity.

During the Convention, there are bound to be diverging views on what the challenges of the tourism industry will be in the next 10 to 20 years. Exciting ideas on how to address these challenges will also surface - not all will be immediately attainable or feasible. Collectively we must be ready to innovate and test these ideas in a bid to address the challenges and build the necessary resilience of the EU tourism ecosystem for the future.

Hon. Julia Farrugia Portelli  
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