

**Written statement from Rimantas Sinkevičius, Minister of the Economy and Innovation  
of the Republic of Lithuania**

**on the occasion of the European Tourism Convention (2020, October 12th)**

Dear Europeans,

We live in amazing times when innovation bring up new opportunities and shape our everyday lives. But on the other hand, we live in strange times when all at once one virus affects our habits and our ways of connecting each other. It is therefore high time to consider the challenges we will be facing in the coming decades so as to make life more predictable. In this regard, let me outline 5 main challenges the European tourism sector may be facing in the next 10 or 20 years:

**Restoring trust.** At this stage, numerous measures are in place aimed to recover the tourism sector across the EU. Safety and certainty have always been the main needs of travellers. We must therefore provide them with access to the most relevant and appropriate information on the free movement of persons within the EU.

**Increasing the competitiveness of the EU tourism sector.** While competing with other regions for the recovery of tourist flows, we must continue with the EU as the most attractive tourist destination anyway. Supporting this sector is therefore not enough. It is vital to have a clear vision and strategy for Europe to achieve a better competitiveness of the tourism sector in the EU.

**Green and climate friendly tourism.** The European Green Deal will bring about changes with regard to various modes of transport generally used for travelling. Yet, new requirements for transport are likely to trouble the competitiveness of the EU tourism sector.

**Protecting SMEs.** The tourism sector is undoubtedly dominated by SMEs. The Covid-19-related crisis was the reason that led some of them to go bankrupt, others now are in high need of extra funding to ensure their business activity. In this situation, is it absolutely necessary that SMEs working in the tourism sector have access to a variety of funding opportunities.

**Ensuring tourism for all.** The availability of tourism services, infrastructure and travel opportunities for everyone remains an issue of high relevance. It is important that all the Member States could equally benefit from the results of a variety of EU initiatives. A good example here might be moving forward with the DiscoverEU program, designed to encourage young people to visit those Member States which have been facing the lack of tourist attention as yet and to offer such tourists other modes of transport where rail option is not available.

In the light of the challenges identified for the tourism sector, let me point out 5 main investment priorities which, to my mind, are necessary to achieve the sustainable recovery and strengthen the resilience of the EU tourism ecosystem.

**Digital innovation for the tourism sector.** It is important that the tourism sector could benefit from digital technologies, like big data or AI. Digitalisation may lead to safer and more efficient services; moreover, it may help in gathering real-time data. Of course, the digitalisation of the tourism sector requires a particular focus on the relevant skills of entrepreneurs and employees of this sector.

**The continuity of the measures, which fitted to the purpose.** The measures aimed to restore the tourism sector, which worked perfectly and are of great importance for tourism businesses, especially SMEs, should

be continued. For example, the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania has initiated a new measure called 'Tourism Innovation'. This measure aims to create, improve and present tourism services as well as to train employees of tourism companies so as to encourage innovative activities in the tourism sector of Lithuania.

**Cooperation and the exchange of good practices.** Cooperation among the Member States is crucial to achieve the recovery of tourism. We must share best practices and seek common action. In this connection, I welcome the idea of a website containing measures applicable for tourists in all the Member States. Besides, this could be a platform for sharing other relevant information.

**Marketing campaigns.** Effective marketing campaigns shall be organised to attract tourists and encourage travelling at both EU and national levels.

**Ensuring the safety of travellers.** The 'next generation' safety standards must be guaranteed for every traveller. This includes ensuring the vaccine requirements, stricter entry procedures in airports and other cross-border areas and high standards of hygiene rules. Besides, tourist attractions and objects, including their staff, must be made safer. Moreover, the surveillance systems and testing equipment in these objects should be installed or updated as well. These costly but necessary measures will ensure safety and earn the trust of the customers.

To conclude and link all these issues of importance I would like to express hope that all the lessons we've learned from this pandemic and the valuable ideas we are sharing here will contribute to the faster recovery and the entering of a new age of the tourism sector.