

## **Statement of the Minister of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the European Tourism Convention (12 October 2020)**

It is unquestionable that tourism belongs among the sectors, which have been affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic. Extensive travel restrictions resulted in a large decrease in number of visitors and overnight stays in countries across the whole world. The spread of new coronavirus infection shows us how fragile the tourism ecosystem is.

Our common goal is free movement and travel, however, safety and health of our citizens must remain our highest priority.

We should look ahead to the future of tourism in our countries and in the European Union and focus on how to make tourism sustainable.

The current crisis provided us with experience that could help us to face future challenges better.

We know that it is essential to restore consumers' confidence in travel and tourism, and ensure tourism to be more resilient.

It is important to increase coordination among Member States regarding the measures related to travelling within the European Union and into Europe. This coordinated approach is needed to reduce the impact of restrictions on citizens and the economy and to ensure transparency and predictability, while taking into account a high level of health protection of our citizens. We consider important to improve cooperation among Member States, share accurate and timely information, data and best practices.

Among main challenges for European tourism in the next years, we include the importance of ensuring substantial and adequate support to the tourism sector to protect businesses and jobs as tourism businesses are facing an acute liquidity crisis.

Tourism jobs are under serious threat. We have to invest in creating resilient workforce in the tourism sector. We should focus on increasing existing opportunities for upskilling in order to avoid shortages of skills in the future that are necessary for green and digital tourism.

The future of the European tourism is in the digital transition. Tourism can benefit from digital technologies, providing new opportunities in managing tourism enterprises, new possibilities for tourists as well as more efficient use of limited sources. Investments in digitalisation provide a competitive advantage in the international tourism market. Hand in hand with digital transition goes access to data and the use of big data analysis, which can help to anticipate new trends and consumer patterns in tourism.

The next important challenge is to ensure sustainability and tourism transition into the green sector. It is linked with carbon-neutral mobility, circular economy, etc.

Last but not least, I would mention promotion of Europe as the top world's tourist destination and to maintain Europe as the leading tourist destination. It will require not only investments in promotion but also diversification of tourism offer, extension off season opportunities, protection of cultural and natural assets across Europe and further investments.

I believe that together we will be able to build a resilient, sustainable and competitive tourism that will face future challenges more easily and that will bring benefits to both the economies of individual countries and their people.