

**EUSAIR STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE 2021
RE-ROUTING TOURISM AIMING AT SUSTAINABLE GREEN
MACROREGION**

25 November 09:00 – 10:00

- Thank you very much for this invitation to speak at the EUSAIR stakeholder conference. I would have liked to give my speech in Rovinj – which I know quite well - but due to another surge of COVID cases we are seeing throughout Europe, I am glad that the organisers were able to move it to an online format.
- Re-routing tourism for a more sustainable macro-region is the timely topic chosen for this conference. And there is a good number of reasons for this.
- The summer 2021 season has been critical for the rebound of the tourism ecosystem given the disastrous results in 2020 where we saw a drop of 70 % in revenues.
- Fortunately, in 2021 many travelers returned to Europe, particularly to its coastal regions which witnessed a recovery close to pre-pandemic levels. Other regions were still struggling.

- To give an example, commercial flights to Greece were down only 7% in August compared to 2019.
- The same goes for Croatia. Even though the waves of the coronavirus have been sweeping across Europe, tourist arrivals during the summer were not much lower compared to the same period before the pandemic. Almost 1.8 million arrivals were recorded at accommodation establishments in September 2021. Moreover, the tourism season has been significantly extended with many localities i.e. islands having now more guests than ever.
- In that context, from the beginning of the crisis the Commission was doing its utmost to re-establish trust in citizens for safe and healthy travels.
- The set up of the Re-Open EU website supported travelers in their considerations already during the summer 2020. The website, followed by the app, was visited by 1 million people during the first week after its launch.
- A crucial step was the delivery of vaccine doses to EU Member States and the Western Balkans to make

them rapidly available to citizens and those most vulnerable to the virus. Clearly, we all remember that in the beginning there were some hiccups and delays. But all in all joint procuring certainly turned out to help delivering vaccines to all our countries.

- This was followed up by the roll out of the EU Digital Covid Certificate, issued on 1 July 2021, right in time for the summer. And we all can see now how it is working – and how it would be different if every Member State would have done it on its own.
- However, business travels, an important branch of the tourism industry, is still struggling. We are witnessing it ourselves following this meeting online instead of meeting in person in Croatia.
- The Adriatic-Ionian region is a true cultural melting pot very much contributing to Europe being one of the most popular destinations in the world. With its unique experiences from gastronomy, to natural and cultural heritage, traditions, hospitality, historical sites, impressive coastlines it acts as a magnet for a large variety of tourism experience.

- But tourism does not only contribute to countries' GDP, it also encourages people to people contacts. These personal experiences bring us closer together and let us see that in Europe we do not only share a common future but also a common history and cultural influences.
- We also want people from all over the world to be able again to enjoy our cultural richness but in a safe and more resilient way. So what is next?
- First, the fight against COVID-19 remains a critical factor to restore people's confidence in safe travels. Therefore, the EU will continue to support vaccine production and distribution on a domestic and global level. We are not able to win the fight if we forget about our neighbours and partners.
- Second, at the COP26 meeting, President von der Leyen urged to keep the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees reminding us all that there is no time to waste.

- The tourism sector is a double edged sword in this respect: it is highly vulnerable to climate change but at the same time a big contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. We cannot close our eyes to this.
- Covid-19 might have slowed down flight operations and tourist visitor numbers, but once the sector will be fully able to restart, tourism cannot continue to be a major contributor to CO2 emissions.
- The long-term recovery of the tourism ecosystem has to support the fight against climate change.
- The update of the EU Industrial Strategy highlights the need to accelerate the green and digital transitions and increase resilience. This means giving priority to the ecosystems and sectors that face the most important challenges and have been most heavily affected by the crisis.
- Tourism has been recognized to be one of these critical ecosystems. Therefore it has been tackled first by co-creating its Transition Pathway through a

stakeholder consultation, which ended in September 2021.

- The Transition Pathway outlines possible scenarios for a more resilient, sustainable and innovative tourism ecosystem, which will contribute to a shared vision for 2030. These scenarios rely on increased digitization, better management of tourism destinations and mitigation of the detrimental impacts of tourism on the environment, human health and local communities.
- All those who see their future in tourism should take inspiration from the Transition Pathway for working on the revision of the EUSAIR that is about to be launched.
- We want this revision to be a bottom-up approach involving all actors to adapt to new challenges for the Adriatic and Ionian Region in tourism and beyond.
- We have the ambition to expand, with the help of the EUSAIR, EU policies beyond EU borders, to promote enlargement and convergence in the region that

needs these policies to reduce wide social and economic regional disparities.

- We also want young people to be part of the revision process to have a direct impact on their very own future.
- This is why we are working closely with the Albanian Presidency of the EUSAIR for the organization of a series of events dedicated to young people during the EUSAIR Annual Forum in May 2022, in cooperation with “Tirana Youth Capital 2022”.
- Their enthusiasm and commitment to a greener, smarter and more digital Europe has been expressed in many youth events I have attended throughout the last year. We, as policy-makers, are called to listen to them and to give them the right room for participation.
- The last session of today, panel 3, will be dealing with the revision of the EUSAIR. So I encourage all of you to kick start new trends and demands for a sustainable Adriatic and Ionian Region that can be enjoyed by generations to come.

- Lastly, I would also like to use the opportunity to call on all key EUSAIR stakeholders, in particular the Managing Authorities and NIPACs, to make last adjustments for the embedding process. It is really a key to find the place for activities of macro-regional importance in mainstream programmes under Cohesion Policy and under the IPA programming framework for 2021-2027.
- I thank you once more for this invitation and look forward to fruitful discussions.