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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Council

Subject: Outcome of initiatives and conferences in the field of tourism in the first semester of 2018
- Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find attached a note from the Presidency on the above-mentioned subject with a view to the Competitiveness Council on 28-29 May 2018.



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**INFORMATION ON THE MAIN INITIATIVES REGARDING TOURISM
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU**

On January 1st 2018, a decade after its accession to the EU, Bulgaria took over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time. During six months, Bulgaria is the main driving force for the tasks on the agenda of the Union, by performing the functions of a mediator, a political leader, a representative and a coordinator. The key to attaining common goals is unity and this is the reason Bulgaria chose “United We Stand Strong” for its slogan.

Tourism is undoubtedly a driver for peace and understanding between peoples by allowing the exchange of ideas and cultures, as well as one of the main drivers of the European economies. It is a major source of income and employment and a factor for sustainable development. In 2017, the EU registered over 500 million international arrivals, an increase of 8% on the previous year (UNWTO 2018). The tourism sector contributed overall (directly and indirectly) to 10.2% of EU GDP and employed 25 million people (WTTC 2018).

It is only through cooperation and unity that Europe can continue to stand strong as the world's first tourism destination and reap its benefits. For this reason, the Ministry of Tourism has taken the initiative to organize several events, giving a forum to European officials and stakeholders to further the agenda of the EU in the field of tourism.

There are several trends likely to have a significant impact on the tourism industry, such as sustainability, digital technologies, connectivity and evolution of the visitor demand. Considering their profound and lasting influence on the sector, it is essential to explore their implication to better inform policy and shape the future of tourism. This is the logic that underpins the choice of the themes for the events organized by the Ministry of Tourism in the context of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the EU Member States and High-Level Conference on Tourism and Economic Growth (Sofia, 13 February 2018)

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) organized an Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the EU Member States and High-level Conference on Tourism and Economic growth to exchange constructive ideas and proposals for the development of the tourism sector and advance cooperation in the field. The EU Commissioner for Single Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Elżbieta Bienkowska, the Secretary General of UN's World Tourism Organisation Zurab Pololikashvili, as well as European ministers and delegates from the EU Member States attended the forum.

The Informal Meeting of Tourism Ministers, led by the Bulgarian Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova, focused on tourism industry as a sustainable factor for economic growth, regional integration and peace. The exchanges of views also referred to sharing/collaborative economy and connectivity as an enabling factor for broadening people relations, including its positive impact for the Balkan region, as well as to synergies between tourism and cohesion policies. The Informal Meeting of Tourism Ministers was followed by a High-level Conference gathering a diversity of representatives of NGOs, academia, business stakeholders and governmental officials.

Key messages and outcomes from the Informal Meeting and the High-Level Conference:

- Creation of a common Map of the European cultural tourism sites.
- Creation of a European financial instrument for the Promotion of Sustainable Development of Tourism.
- Intensifying the efforts towards a new strategic framework at EU level.
- Mainstreaming tourism throughout EU and national policies in order to further enhance coordination and cooperation between all tourism stakeholders at all levels, European, national, regional and local.
- Several initiatives appear as relevant to contribute to the competitiveness of the tourism sector, as for example:
 - Creation of a common Map of the European tourism cultural sites
 - Measures and decisions to make Europe a safer and more attractive tourism destination
 - Initiatives to address challenges regarding the new image of the Western Balkan as a region of prosperity and peace
 - Enhanced regional and cross-border cooperation for the development and implementation of joint tourism products and packages designed for long distance markets, such as China
 - Actions to exploit opportunities for attracting more Chinese visitors to Europe, in particular the Balkan region

International Roundtable on Tourism and Digital Transformation (Sofia, 15 February 2018)

Tackling the challenges and opportunities presented by digitalization and reflecting on its implications for the competitiveness of the European tourism sector is the second cornerstone priority of the Bulgarian Presidency . In line with this, the Ministry of Tourism organized for the first time an International Roundtable on Tourism and Digital Transformation aimed at delineating the growing significance of the new economic models or the shared economy phenomenon, digital culture and innovative management and preservation of cultural heritage.

Key messages:

- Many innovative online platforms and business models are based on the collaborative economy
- Digital security and the development of digital skills and competences
- Innovative management of cultural heritage – digitalization, 3-D mapping of cultural tourism sites, virtual museums
- Sustainable development of the tourism sector by creating new educational opportunities and facilitating the access to national patrimony

International Roundtable on Cultural Tourism (Veliko Tarnovo, 19 April 2018)

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU recognizes the importance of culture as an essential part of the European tourism experience and an element that can enhance the profile of Europe as leading tourism destination in the world. Following up on the results of the High-level Meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the EU Member States – ‘Tourism and Economic Growth’ (13th February 2018- Sofia, Bulgaria) the International Roundtable focused on Cultural Tourism within the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage and on Cultural Tourism and Creative Industries, exploring the link between the film industry and tourism.

Key messages:

- Elaboration of a Common Map of the European Cultural Tourism Sites
- Creation of thematic European Cultural Tourism Routes
- Harnessing the collective potential of European cultural sites - marketing tool for EU Member States
- Film induced tourism as a phenomenon to be further explored
- Cultural tourism and film tourism offer opportunities to diversify tourism offer and overcome seasonality.

Joint Balkan Tourism Route Meeting (Sofia, 8 May 2018)

Building on the first of its kind High-level meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the EU Member States, Turkey and the Western Balkans held in Sofia on February 13th 2018, participants of this event generated many proposals which can be turned into policies in the near future, such as the creation of a Common European Map of Cultural Tourism Sites and the establishment of a Joint Balkan Tourism Route.

Key messages:

- Enhancing effective regional cooperation in the field of tourism
- Creation of a Joint Balkan Tourism Route and promotion on distant markets in Asia, North and South America
- Development of sub-routes throughout the Balkan region

International Conference on Macro-Regional Cooperation in Tourism and Energy (Sofia, 23 May 2018)

Organized by the Ministry of Tourism, the event brought together, for the first time, representatives of the four EU macro-regional strategies, namely for the Baltic Sea Region, the Danube Region, the Adriatic and Ionian Region, and the Alpine Region, who provided a concrete and up-to-date presentation of the particular issues relevant for all EU macro-regional strategies related to tourism and energy consumption.

Key messages:

- Cause and effect relationship between tourism and energy consumption
- Importance of connectivity as a common topic of interest
- RES (Renewable Energy Sources) and geothermal synergies in tourism and energy
- Macro-regional cooperation improvements in tourism and energy
- Financial supporting schemes for efficient energy use

Meeting of the Ministers in charge of Tourism of BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) Member States (Varna, 14 June 2018)

“A sustainable and integrated approach for the Danube and the Black Sea regions” is one of the priorities during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of EU. The Black Sea is a ‘bridge’ between the cultures of Europe and Asia and it has great opportunities to enhance the cooperation between the countries in the region in the field of tourism.

Key topics of discussion:

- Promoting the Black Sea Region as one of the leading tourism destinations of the world.
 - Sustainable tourism development by adopting green growth strategies that will enable economic expansion.
 - Joint projects and programs in the field of maritime, winter, sports, health, spa and wellness, business tourism.
 - Cultural tourism/Cultural routes projects in the Black Sea Region and their implementation.
 - Trans-border cooperation and connectivity with the countries in the region.
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