Tourism Panel at Bled Strategic Forum 2021 highlights key challenges of European tourism



As part of this year's Bled Strategic Forum, the Tourism Panel hosted renowned international experts, who highlighted one of the key current issues that the tourism industry in Europe deals with today: What will the future bring? Prominent international and Slovenian experts, guests, panelists and representatives of Slovenian tourism were addressed by Minister of Economic Development and Technology Zdravko Počivalšek, Director-General for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs at the European Commission Kerstin Jorna, Director of the Slovenian Tourist Board (STB) MSc. Maja Pak, Director of Regional Department for Europeat at the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Prof. Alessandra Priante and Director of the Portugal National Tourist Board and President of the European Travel Commission (ETC) Luis Araújo.

As part of **the 16th Bled Strategic Forum (BSF)**, a panel entitled The Future of European Tourism was held for the 7th time in a row. At the panel, prominent personalities from the tourism industry discussed the challenges of tourism today and tomorrow.

This year's Tourism Panel therefore raises the question **What**

will the future bring to European tourism?

In his introductory speech, Minister of Economic Development and Technology **Zdravko Počivalšek** highlighted the future of tourism and described it as a sector that quickly responds to changes: *"The last 'corona' years have undoubtedly been a great test for European and thus for Slovenian tourism, but I would like to recall the well-known fact that tourism is known as a sector that reacts very quickly to changes in society and adapts to them. This is why I believe that it will be the same this time. With a 70% drop in overnight stays of foreign guests in Slovenia, the recovery will of course be a bit longer, but we must be aware that the trends according to which tourism will develop in the future are something we have been practicing in Slovenia for the last seven years. Boutique, sustainable, safe, tailor-made experiences in tourism are the foundations on which we have built our success already in the past strategic framework. It is also important to emphasize that, according to the findings of Eurostat, we are the country that has increased the volume of domestic tourism to the greatest extent – also thanks to timely and appropriate measures of the state. In the year and a half of the epidemic, the government has supported tourism with one billion funds, thus proving that it is aware of the strategic importance of the industry for the national economy and believes in its further development."*

Kerstin Jorna, Director-General for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs at the European Commission, highlighted the efforts of EU Member States to safely revive tourism flows and recover tourism: *"The joint efforts of the EU Member States in the vaccination campaign and in implementing the EU Digital COVID Certificate have been paramount in the smooth reopening of the travel. By end of August, we had more than 355 million EU Digital Certificates issued. There are 54 countries either connected to the European Digital Certificate Gateway or applying to do so.*

Just before the summer, the European Commission launched a co-creation process to create a transitional path in tourism. We want to define together with all the stakeholders a roadmap for the industry and destinations, a blueprint of European Tourism that is greener, fit for the digital age and ultimately more resilient and competitive."

MSc. Maja Pak, Director of the STB, highlighted the key challenges of European tourism in the light of the changed situation and the new conditions posed by the pandemic to the European tourism industry: *"Last year, the pandemic plunged tourism into the biggest crisis so far and showed the great economic importance of tourism and its impact on other activities. Many companies are struggling to survive. A precondition for the resumption of tourist flows as soon as possible is coordinated action and intensive coordination between European countries on flow restrictions. At the same time, the pandemic brings challenges and new opportunities for more sustainable, resilient and inclusive tourism. The behaviour of tourists has changed dramatically due to pandemics, climate change and other challenges. For the successful transformation of tourism, it is necessary to redefine performance indicators and better business models that will enable a sustainable and digital transformation. There is a need for close cooperation between all stakeholders: government, tourism organizations and businesses, local communities and employees. To gain back the trust of tourists and to seek the satisfaction of the local population, it is necessary to create better tourism, but we do not want to return to the old tracks. It is therefore necessary to think in advance about the coordinated shaping of the European future of tourism, which is a key theme of this year's panel."*

Prof. Alessandra Priante, Director of Regional Department for Europe at at the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), addressed the participants: *"Collaboration and cooperation are key to*

restart tourism, to establish harmonised protocols, that will increase predictability of the procedures before, during and after travel, which in turn is the prerequisite for tourists' willingness, let alone desire to travel."

Luís Araújo, President of the European Travel Commission (ETC) and the Director of the Portugal National Tourist Board, pinpointed: *"The future of Tourism will be brighter if we base our actions in a collective and shared responsibility, focusing on how to transform and improve our sector (from supply to demand). Tourism can and will be, more than ever, a force for good."*

Take a look also at **the video**, in which **Zurab Pololikashvili**, Secretary-General of the UNWTO, addressed the participants.

The current challenges and opportunities of European tourism were discussed by **Simon Zajc**, State Secretary at the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia; **Lola Uña Cárdenas**, Vice President of Government Affairs at World Travel & Tourism Council; **Jane Stacey**, Head of Tourism Unit, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; **Marie Audren**, Director General, Association of Hotels, Restaurants, Pubs and Cafes (HOTREC); **MSc. Petra Stušek**, Director of Ljubljana Tourism and the President of the Board at European Cities Marketing; and **Dr Mario Hardy**, former CEO of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).