

Towards an EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism: building forward smarter and greener in the EU coastal & insular regions

1 October 2021 - 11:00 -16:30 CEST – Online webinar

MINUTES

Welcome addresses

Eleni Marianou, Secretary General at the CPMR, opened the event highlighting the importance to discuss the future of European tourism in the context of the EC's consultations and proposals. Ms Marianou also underlined the CPMR's catalysing role in this process, such as the contribution to DG GROW's consultation on the tourism transition pathway. Throughout the meeting, she [stressed](#) the importance to involve regional authorities in the implementation of national action plans and EU roadmaps to the benefit of the touristic sector and to adapt to climate change threatening coastal tourism.

Josianne Cutajar, MEP, SEArca member, [welcomed](#) the participants to the SEArca event and highlighted how the pandemic can represent an opportunity to rebuild tourism differently, shifting from quantity to quality. She emphasised the need to enhance community engagement and put host communities, including regional and local authorities, at the heart of the sector. On the matter, EU funding and Cohesion Policy represent two key elements to support the long-term strategy for recovery, particularly in coastal and insular regional economies that are strongly dependent on tourism. She recalled how the European Parliament resolution on "transport and tourism in 2020 and beyond" supports the development of a 2050 roadmap towards a sustainable, innovative, and resilient European tourism ecosystem ('European Agenda for Tourism 2050'). At the same time, she stressed that the [EP 2021 INI report](#) on an EU strategy for sustainable tourism provides the guidelines towards a smarter, greener, and more resilient sector. MEP Cutajar concluded saying that with the right model and resources in place it will be possible to build a more synergistic, fair, and green tourism sector, aligned with the sustainable blue economy.

Vangelis Meimarakis, SEArca Vice-Chair for Tourism and Mediterranean, [demanded](#) full support from the EU institutions for Mediterranean islands and territories to achieve an efficient, green, and smart recovery. MEP Meimarakis underlined how this summer was crucial for the tourism sector and the protection and promotion of the European tourism offer. In particular, in his country, Greece, this was a successful summer given that tourist arrivals and revenues from tourism sector exceeded expectations. He also underlined that the European Green Certificate facilitated the movement of European citizens within EU territory. He then stressed that the time has come to reshape our tourism offer to further increase its quality standards and stay competitive and attractive. Indeed, he highlighted that the funds of the Recovery Package should be channelled to reforms and investments for the green and digital transition of the tourist destinations, but also for the companies that are active in the sector, in order to create green jobs and strengthen the notion of sustainable tourism. In this context, this SEArca event represented a fruitful contribution to the development and promotion of the tourist industry in the coming years.

Session I: Exchange between the European Commission, CPMR Regions and MEPs

Valentina Superti, Director responsible for Ecosystems II: Tourism & Proximity (DG GROW), [opened](#) the first session of the event stressing that regions are at the core of the EU tourism strategy, and nowadays, the most popular tourism activities in regions are threatened by seasonality and climate change. However, the recovery of the tourism sector is moving forward, as more and more Member States are dedicating a tourism component in their national recovery or tourism related measures. Ms Superti highlighted how the European Commission has launched a co-creation process on the tourism transition pathway which intends to include all tourism stakeholders in the creation of a roadmap for a green, digital, and resilient tourism sector in the EU. Finally, she emphasised that the tourism transition needs to focus on green and digital issues, strengthen the sustainable

development of tourism, protect communities and natural habitats, secure carbon neutrality, and invest in nature-based solutions.

Christos Economou, Deputy Director – Head of Unit (DG MARE), [remarked](#) that in the blue economy, tourism is seen as a traditional sector, but it is time to give space to innovation and change in the framework of the green recovery. He stressed the importance of promoting this new way of tourism, via coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders. He also presented DG MARE's plan to manage the [BLUE INVEST platform](#), a blue investment initiative for SMEs that provides solutions linked to the green and blue economy in different aspects. Finally, he pointed out the importance of cross border cooperation and creating the right partnerships such as the Cruise dialogue session organised by DG MARE to gather all the cruise sector stakeholders.

Interventions of political representatives from CPMR Geographical Commissions on needs, state of play and perspectives: Islands, Atlantic Arc, and Intermediterranean Commissions

Eduardo Jesus, Regional Secretary for Tourism, Madeira (Portugal) and member of the CPMR Island Commission [remarked](#) that after the pandemic crisis the need to coordinate actions for tourism emerged, notably by encouraging competitiveness and creating specific EU funding programmes for the sector. He stressed that the tourism sector should be adapted to today's needs in order to evolve over time. Mr Jesus highlighted the difficulty that the Madeira archipelago is facing concerning its dependence on the tourism and transport sectors, two interconnected elements that should be adapted to ensure their modernisation and sustainability, more than ever during this recovery period. He finally underlined that the Madeira Region is committed to positioning itself as a safe destination. In 2021 they started the process to achieve the Sustainable Destination Certification according to the criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

Marta Barca, Director General of Tourism from Cantabria (Spain) and member of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission, [started](#) with a stocktaking of the summer season in Cantabria, which showed the first recovery signs. She stressed that the priorities of the EU tourism recovery agenda should focus on support for SMEs, regional campaigns, and actions to promote the Atlantic as a destination, develop sustainable tourism, reduce seasonality, and engage in digitalisation. She also underlined that sustainable tourism is one of the key pillars in EU macro-regional or sea basin strategies and its strategic planning is integrated with other sectors, such as the Blue Economy. She then reported the need to promote alternative sustainable tourism offers, such as ecotourism, slow tourism, rural tourism, inland tourism, mountain tourism, cycle tourism, etc. Finally, she concluded her intervention underlining the role that the regions should play in the process of reviving tourism and the transition to sustainable tourism, working together on common projects to address the challenges and the joint transition towards sustainable models, with coherent and common strategies, in the light of the opportunities that the 2021-2027 programming period can offer.

Georges Alexakis, Coordinator of the IMC Task Force on Sustainable Tourism and Culture, Vice-President of the CPMR for Maritime Affairs, Vice-President of Crete Region (Greece), [highlighted](#) that tourism is a key sector for many Mediterranean regions. Mr Alexakis recalled the focal points of the political agenda on sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region, which addressed four main priorities: the first one is to stimulate performance and competitiveness, focusing on the extension of the tourism season, the public-private dialogue and the promotion of tourist-related skills in the EU. The second priority focuses on improving the lack of data in the tourism sector and promoting the setting up of regional and local labour. The third priority is to strengthen sustainability, with a focus on the proposal of ecotourism and the fourth priority is to promote sustainable and culture tourism in the main emerging macro-regional strategies. He finally stressed the importance of multi-level governance in the transition towards a sustainable tourism.

Reaction by the European Commission

Christos Economou, Deputy Director–Head of Unit (DG MARE), [stressed](#) the importance that Geographical Commissions play to bring actors together and to implement cooperation projects. He emphasised the

importance of cooperative work at sea basin and macro-regional level, which should take into consideration communities and stakeholders. Mr Economou recalled the importance of educating citizens and offering them new products that suit the current challenges. For outermost regions, tourism -as a part of the sustainable blue economy- is also vital to achieve the transition and recovery. In brief, he stressed the key role of the Geographical Commissions in the tourism transition by implementing new projects and bringing together all the stakeholders in the right direction.

Marie Helene Pradines, Head of Unit (DG GROW), [added](#) a few comments regarding the summer season by emphasising that even if there is still a long journey, the results were better than the 2020 season; the digital COVID certificate and the ambitious vaccination campaign in Europe have been fruitful for the tourism sector. She also expressed her satisfaction that all participants share the same objectives towards sustainability, while stressing the importance of working on concrete and realistic actions to achieve the common goals, for which regions are key actors.

Interventions of political representatives from CPMR Geographical Commissions on needs, state of play and perspectives: Baltic Sea, North Sea and Balkan and Black Sea Commissions

Harry Bouveng, Vice-Chair of the Maritime Working Group of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and Regional Councillor of Stockholm (Sweden) [shared](#) experiences from Region Stockholm and presented key points on supporting sustainable, resilient, and competitive tourism in a post-COVID-19 context in the Baltic Sea Region. Mr Bouveng highlighted how the tourism industry in the Baltic Sea region has been significantly impacted by the loss of international arrivals due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the region is facing a slow recovery and had a positive outlook for 2022. He underlined that Stockholm has supported the industry via funds to the municipalities, EU-funded projects that support SMEs within the tourism industry, and through business coaching. Mr Bouveng stressed the importance of funding, innovation and sustainable development, in particular in this moment of recovery post pandemic.

Beate Johnsen, Councillor of Agder (Norway), CPMR North Sea Commission, [presented](#) a report on the main findings of the 2020 CPMR/North Sea Commission Smart Regions Group webinar on "[Tourism- ways of adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)". The [report](#) presents best practices that enterprises, local authorities and tourism organisations in the North Sea Regions have put in place within the pandemic crisis. It also provides recommendations on possible adaptation measures such as engaging actively with local communities, lowering the dependency on foreign tourists, developing more offers for domestic tourists and local residents and improving the quality of tourist infrastructure, services and products.

Tinatin Zoidze, Head of the Department of Tourism and Resorts of Ajara Region (Georgia), CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission [Reaction by the European Commission](#), [shared](#) experiences, on-going policies and challenges of the sustainability transition within the Georgian Government. She also explained how the recent news of four national parks and protected areas nominated as UNESCO heritage gave relevance and boosted sustainable tourism development in the whole Georgian region.

Reaction by MEPs

Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar, SEArca Vice-Chair for Outermost Regions, [highlighted](#) the key proposals from the INI Report on the EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, underlining that the report will be the first step towards the European co-creation process and represents an opportunity to share concrete actions at the EU level. She also stressed that the Conference of the Future of Europe should be the place to discuss tourism competences, represent an important step in the development of the EU tourism transition pathway and strengthen what the EU Treaties currently provide for.

François Alfonsi, SEArca Vice-Chair for Islands, [addressed](#) the financial support needed for the recovery of the tourism sector, which became even more vulnerable in islands. He also denounced the catastrophic impact of oil spills and marine litter on insular tourism in the Mediterranean. MEP Alfonsi invited the Balearic Islands,

Sardinia, and Corsica to cooperate more and stressed integrated planning and the implementation of a participatory and multi-level approach to tourism governance.

Session II - Focus on Sustainable Tourism and Integrated Management in the Islands

Interventions by MEPs

Josianne Cutajar, SEArica member, underlined that recovery strategies can be an opportunity to reshape the tourism sector integrating it with new technologies, giving importance to local communities, move from quantity to quality, and adapt tourism to the climate impact we are experiencing. Moreover, she added that future insular tourism models should: concentrate investments in renewable energy; carry out studies in order to preserve natural environments and cultural heritage in islands; take advantage of recovery plans; and invest in training a skilled workforce in the tourism sector.

François Alfonsi, SEArica Vice-Chair for Islands noted how the growth of tourism activities modified socio-economic realities and greatly impacted fragile ecosystems. Future tourism models must reinvest touristic incomes in the conservation of local ecosystems, also because preserved natural environments are becoming a more and more demanded asset for touristic basins. MEP Alfonsi also stressed that tourism policies must be embedded in a wider reflection and work for on-site populations, promoting regional products and agriculture and keeping real estate accessible for local inhabitants. MEP Alfonsi furthermore highlighted that if we don't tackle the environmental pressures and socio-economic consequences of tourism today, it will become even more difficult for future generations.

Interventions by regional representatives/territorial stakeholders from island member regions of the CPMR belonging to different sea basins on the needs, measures, and perspective of collaboration for the sustainable recovery of the sector in the islands

Mats Jansson, Business Development Strategist at Region Gotland (Sweden), CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, presented the key tourism areas that Gotland is developing: food and drink, outdoors and experiences based on island nature and culture. Moreover, he described how stakeholders are gathered in each area to focus on new innovative and sustainable solutions, working with local raw materials and circular economy to achieve change.

Rosario Sánchez, Regional Minister for Finances and External Relations, Balearic Islands, (Spain), CPMR Islands Commission, described the three core pillars of the Balearic Islands' tourism strategy: territorial; environmental and socio-economic. Moreover, she underlined that the Balearic Islands over the next few years will invest to improve the islands' economic model, based on local products, blue economy, sustainability and digital, given that she strongly believes that sustainability should not be an option but an obligation.

Konstantinos Kapodistrias, Vice Governor of Ionia Nissia (Greece), CPMR Islands Commission, reiterated the devastating consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in all Greek Islands even if the summer season showed recovery signs compared to 2020 numbers. He presented some of the measures taken to tackle the situation such as health protocol seminars for tourism professionals, extensive vaccination campaigns, support to SMEs and participation in transnational projects.

Exchange with key organisations and participants

Jeremy Sampson, CEO Travel Foundation – Future of Tourism Coalition, stressed how today's uncertainty in the tourism sector represents a threat for islands and maritime areas in the Mediterranean that are dependent on tourism. He claimed that the recovery from the pandemic can be an opportunity to reshape the tourism sector integrating it with new technologies, give importance to marginalised groups at the local level, and adapt tourism to the climate impact we are experiencing.

Virginia Fernandez-Trapa, Programme Officer, Sustainable Development of Tourism at World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) highlighted that the Glasgow Declaration on tourism and climate has the aim to secure strong action in the framework of COP26. She underlined that signatories commit to: supporting the global

commitment to halve emissions by 2030 and reach Net Zero as soon as possible and before 2050; delivering climate action plans within 12 months from becoming a signatory and implementing them; reporting publicly on an annual basis on progress against targets and actions and working in a collaborative spirit. She stressed the important role played by the tourism sector, and thus the importance of the tourism stakeholders' subscription to the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action to work urgently together within a consistent wide sector approach to accelerate change.

Tim Fairhurst, Director of Policy for the European Tourism Association, [stated](#) that the collaboration within the Glasgow Declaration is the way forward for a sustainable future to the tourist sector. He also underlined the importance of sharing good practices, given that the collaborative element is essential to compensate regulations which are still in progress.

Bernard Vanheule, Director EU Affairs at Costa Group, [presented](#) the Costa Manifesto for a value-driven seasonable and inclusive tourism. It is a document they would like share with local communities in destinations to support and promote local traditions, cultures, economies, and biodiversity. Collaboration, social inclusion and environmental protection are three key elements for the Manifesto, which also represent Costa values in the prospect of the 2030-2050 agenda.

Presentation of key results from WINTER MED

Nagore Espinosa, CEO at IN2destination, ANCI Toscana, Italy [presented](#) the trans-national strategy for all year-round tourism in Mediterranean Islands under the framework of Interreg MED project [WINTER MED](#). The project provides tools to change and upgrade tourism, as well as innovative solutions to increase the resilience of the tourism sector and commits to its diversification as a crucial means to overthrow seasonality. It specifically supports local SMEs and micro-enterprises as motors for the sustainable recovery of the sector. This is possible thanks to their direct implication within the project Regional Action Plans in Corsica, Tuscany, Cyprus, South Aegean, Dubrovnik-Neretva, and Balearic Islands.

Eudokia Balamou, Operation Manager, ANETEL, (Cyprus) [shared](#) an example of a Regional Action Plan to enable Cyprus to become an all-year-round destination by 2030. Indeed, she underlined that the Island is seeking to solve its main problems related to tourism by structuring a strategy that has as main objectives to deliver a system of high value and well-planned experience in Cyprus, attract the right number of investors and MSMEs, and finally increase tourism's benefit for local communities and the environment.

Franco De Simone, CEO Infoelba Ltd, [described](#) Elba's experience in the sustainable tourism transition. As a private stakeholder involved in the development of the Regional Action Plan of Tuscany, he explained how, in 2020\21 Elba, a small island located in the Tyrrhenian Sea, adopted a common vision of sustainable development, shared with many stakeholders both public and private. He added that WINTER MED represented the first moment of facilitation among all these actors, from which emerged a shared action plan to achieve carbon-neutrality in the island and adopt a series of sustainable behaviours in the tourist sector: minimise water consumption and energy consumption in hotels, cleaning with non-toxic products; ban single-use plastics on the island and increase the number of charging stations for electric cars.

John Borg, Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Gozo (Malta), CPMR Islands Commission, [shared](#) his point of view on the reality of islands. He explained that many Mediterranean islands share the same challenges and that to achieve a sustainable tourism transition, a holistic and integrated approach is needed. He illustrated how Gozo made huge investments to develop the islands and participated in stimulating projects.

Carla Aguirre Muñoz, Vice VD / Deputy Managing Director at Tourism in Skåne AB, [stressed](#) that when it comes to up-skilling and re-skilling we tend to forget the public sector and the governmental, regional and municipality skills, which are key actors to lead the transformation towards a sustainable tourism. She added that, when talking about hospitality, we should also address the responsibility of the guests visiting a destination, and on this topic, we have a lot to learn, to act on and to share in terms of best practices. She also remarked that we need to collaborate not only on a cross-border level, but also with the other parts of the society, on a cross-over

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beyond the tourism sector. Finally, Mrs Aguirre highlighted that the innovations necessary for the prosperity of the tourism sector often do stem from other sectors.

Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar [concluded](#) the session by stressing that the tourism sector needs support from the EC and Member States by the deployment of the funds within Next Generation EU and the multi-annual framework, in particular to support all those regions weakened by the pandemic measures and areas with extreme climatic conditions. She concluded claiming that collaboration and a holistic approach are two essential elements to achieve this transition.

Davide Strangis, **Executive Director of the CPMR**, underlined CPMR's support for the Glasgow Declaration on tourism and climate in view of COP26. Mr Strangis finally [closed](#) the meeting encouraging the participants to maintain joint efforts to create solutions for the sustainable transition of tourism and catalyse an acceleration of climate action during this recovery period, in particular in coastal and insular regions.