

Presentation of **Dr. Aleksandra Tomić**, Head of the Delegation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Chairperson of the Committee on Economy, Regional Development, Trade, Tourism and Energy at the European Interparliamentary Conference on Sustainable Tourism **“Challenges of Sustainable Tourism: Promoting Cultural Heritage and Environmental Protection“**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honourable Members of Parliament,
Representatives of international institutions and organisations,

It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, at the first European Interparliamentary Conference on Sustainable Tourism, and present the situation and the concept of sustainable development of the tourism in the Republic of Serbia, with the special emphasis on responsible use of cultural heritage and environmental protection.

Tourism in the Republic of Serbia is certainly one of the key instruments which can facilitate further promotion of the total economic capacity to cope with competitive pressures. Development of the industry is planned in accordance with the existing regulations governing spatial planning, environment, tourism and other fields. A number of important documents, including the Law on Tourism, the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for 2006-2015, with 17 master plans of priority tourist destinations, Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development Programme, Strategy of the European Union for the Danube Region and others are providing guidelines which need to be followed in order to promote tourism in Serbia, and they also define key tourism products which have been intensively worked on over the years.

The greatest potential for tourism growth in Serbia lies in major cities Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš, cultural tourism opportunities, spa/wellness, mountain and lake, nautical and rural tourism, as well as business and MICE tourism. Special attention is devoted to development of thematic cultural routes and wine tasting and gastronomy tours. One of the best tourist products is an integrated tourism product developed to preserve the way of life and intangible cultural heritage of our country, and thus increase competitiveness and recognition of Serbia as a tourist destination on the global tourism market.

Assessment of the future development and possible improvement of the position of Serbia on the international tourism market depends on the diversity of natural and cultural resources and existing capacities of the tourist offer. A key priority for the development of Serbian tourism is focused on the increase of the economic contribution and volume of tourist trade, primarily by increasing the quality of the offer, promotion of regional cooperation, better positioning of Serbia as an attractive tourist destination on the international tourist market, stimulation of investment activities in the rehabilitation of the existing and the development of the new tourism infrastructure in Serbia, as well as promotion of education and employment of people in this industry.

To illustrate current situation and the importance of tourism for the economic growth of the Republic of Serbia I will present you with some facts and indicators, primarily those that refer to the volume of tourist trade and foreign currency inflow. In 2013 the Republic of Serbia was visited by **2 192 435** tourists (increase of 5,4% in comparison to 2012), including **1 270 667** domestic visitors (increase of 1,1%), accounting for 58% of the total number of

guests, and **921 768** international visitors (increase of 13,8%) accounting for 42% of the total number of guests. The trend of growth in the number of foreign tourists has continued during the course of first seven months in 2014 (increase of 10,9% in comparison to the same period in 2013).

In 2013 there were **6 567 460** registered overnight stays (increase of 1.3% in comparison to 2012), including **4 579 067** by domestic visitors (decline of 2.3%), accounting for 69.7% of the total number of registered overnight stays, and **1 988 393** by international visitors (increase of 10.7%) accounting for 30.3% of the total number of guests.

In 2013, around 36% of guests arrived from former Yugoslav republics, followed by tourists from Italy, Germany, Russian Federation etc. As regards non European countries, highest increase in the guest numbers in comparison to 2012 is registered with tourists from New Zealand (30%), China (20%), Australia (22%) and Canada (18%).

Average length of stay of tourists in Serbia goes from 3.6 to 3.9 nights for domestic visitors and from 2.1 to 2.3 nights for international tourists.

As regards the total number of visits, domestic visitors were most numerous in spa centres (27.5%) where the highest number of overnights was registered (42.7%), while international visitors mostly visited Belgrade (56.8%), where they spent most overnight stays (50.4%). While monitoring tourist traffic in Serbia by type of tourist places visited, we are also gauging the impact and the pressures on the environment in those areas. According to the collected data on the total tourist traffic, it can be concluded that the tourist activity in Serbia is not considerably affecting the environmental quality.

Foreign currency inflow from tourism in 2013 amounted to 792.143 million Euros, an increase of 10% compared to 2012. Growth in foreign currency inflow from tourism continued during the first seven months of 2014 and amounted to 345 million Euros (an increase of 10.5% compared to the same period in 2013). Contribution of tourism to GDP in Serbia in 2001 amounted to 0.8% and 1.1% in 2012.

Sustainable development of tourism is one of the challenges facing not only the tourist economy of Serbia, but also other countries with a high share of tourism in total economic activity. The goals of sustainable development of tourism in Serbia include boosting of domestic tourism demand and the increase of revenues from tourism, improvement of accommodation capacities, development of tourism quality systems and consumer protection systems, development of the tourist information system, well-balanced seasonal flows, and the identification and elimination of actual and potential discords between tourism and other activities related to the use of natural resources.

The rich cultural and historical heritage of Serbia provides a good basis for the development of quality tourism. Emphasis is placed on archaeological sites from different eras of civilization, the buildings from the Roman and Byzantine periods, many fortresses and castles, medieval monasteries and other religious buildings, numerous monuments dedicated to historical events and personalities as well as traditional and unique architecture. On many of these cultural sites, financial investments, reconstruction and maintenance is carried out with the aim of developing a heritage-based sustainable tourism and creative and interactive tourism products. This product can be promoted through the world-popular concept of cultural routes (e.g. Wine Routes, Industrial Heritage, The Roman Emperors' Route, etc.),

which contribute to the sustainable development of local communities in Serbia and their interconnection, as well as connection with the same or similar routes in the surrounding countries. Serbia is a treasure trove of cultural and historical heritage that has evolved under the influence of different civilizations throughout its tumultuous past.

Cooperation in this area should be carried out between line ministries, national tourism organizations, business associations and chambers of tourism and of course the businesses (SMEs) which need to cooperate with the public sector in each of the countries of the Balkans, but also with each other.

Tourism is closely interlinked with the environment. Potential negative impacts could be anticipated in terms of the pressure on natural resources, wildlife and habitat, waste generation, as well as the emissions of pollutants to air, water and land. These pressures may affect the status of natural resources and capital at important tourist destinations. On the other hand, tourism has a great interest in maintaining the quality of the environment at a high level, because environmental degradation may in return jeopardize the future development of this industry, which strongly depends on the status of natural resources. The concept of environmental sustainability in Serbia is achieved through various projects that are being implemented in accordance with the regulations. Even though there is a number of effective laws and regulations which are harmonized with the European standards in the field of environmental protection, responsible tourism in Serbia must constantly bear in mind the seriousness of the pollution of water, air, soil, and waste generation in tourist destinations.

I would like to illustrate this with just a few examples of successful regional cooperation. In the context of regional cooperation we have implemented the project "Regional Cooperation in the Development of Child and Youth Educational Tourism for the development of the Adriatic - Ionian region: current situation and examples of good practice from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy and "The Roman Emperors Route and the Danube Wine Route" which is a specific example of successful initiative of four countries from our region: Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Serbia. Last year, the Union of Travel Agency Associations of South Eastern Europe was set up, which brings together national associations of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. For the past several years we have witnessed cooperation of spa and wellness centers from the Balkans, developed with the aim of creating and promoting new tourism product in Europe – the Spas of the Balkans. So far, three summits have been held and this year Croatia will be the host. Permanent Organizing Committee consists of representatives from Bulgaria, Turkey, Croatia and Serbia.

Dear Colleagues,

I am certain that this conference will contribute to further development of cooperation between the countries participating in the Conference, international institutions and organizations, especially at the regional level, in order to facilitate more successful development of sustainable tourism.