

CHARTER AWARD CEREMONY 2015 – dr. Igor Šoltes speech

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Mr Schops, President of the EUROPARC Federation, and Mrs Petrosillo, from Charter Award Ceremony, for giving me this honour to co-host and to open this special event – Charter Award Ceremony 2015. I would also like to apologize my colleague Mrs Comodini Cachia who unfortunately cannot be here with us today, as she has an important conference in Malta, which she could not miss, and she is sending you her best regards.

When my office was contacted by Europarc Federation to co-host Charter Award Ceremony, I agreed straight away as this is something I strongly support. As The Charter is a voluntary agreement and aims to encourage good practice by recognising protected areas, which are meeting agreed requirements for the sustainable development and management of tourism, it is my privilege to collaborate with Mrs Comodini Cachia and Europarc Federation not only on informing the public that protection of our natural and cultural heritage is rewarded, but also on encouraging other parks to participate in this initiative in the upcoming years.

Tourism in the EU is a cross-cutting sector and the 3rd largest economic activity in the EU. It is a key potential growth area of the European economy, generating over 10 % of the EU's GDP if sectors linked to tourism are taken into account; whereas tourism is also a driver of substantial employment, as it

directly employs 13 million workers and consequently accounts for at least 12 % of jobs in the EU. Europe is the world's number one tourist destination, with a market share of 52 %; whereas statistics show that the majority of trips abroad by EU residents continue to be destinations within the EU, and whereas the number of international tourists arriving in the EU is forecast to increase by 140 million each year until 2025.

If we want to protect our natural and cultural heritage, we need to work hand in hand with nature. As we can see, European cultural tourism plays an important role in promoting Europe's rich cultural diversity, strengthening European identity and promoting cross-cultural exchanges and multicultural understanding. It is very important to promote cooperation between the Member States, particularly by exchanging of good practices. The positive data is that in the last 10 years protected areas in Europe have grown for 23 %, however, the average dimension unfortunately decreased. Sustainable, accessible and responsible tourism that is in harmony with nature, landscape and with urban destinations, and which relies on resource efficiency, sustainable mobility and climate protection, helps to preserve the local environment, and to bring lasting results in terms of regional growth, accommodates the increasing quality demands of travellers and helps companies to compete.

Mrs Comodini Cachia (op. Therese, če vam je ljubše) and I are also part of parliamentary Tourism Intergroup and work closely with the European Parliament on these topics. What is the European Parliament doing on this field at the moment? TRAN (op. Transport and Tourism) committee is working on the Report on new challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in

Europe which was adopted in October's plenary session in Strasbourg. Moreover, the European Parliamentary Research Service has recently published also the in-depth analysis called Tourism and the European Union: Recent trends and policy developments, which elaborates on the notion of sustainable tourism, and please feel free to take your copy at the entrance of this room.

Furthermore, one of the good things the European Commission did is launching Guide on EU FUNDING 2014 – 2020 for the tourism sector, which covers the most important EU programmes for the tourism sector and focuses on (in)direct funding opportunities. Tourism policy priorities contribute to at least three priorities of the Juncker Commission, namely sustainable growth and jobs, the connected digital single market, and a deeper and fairer internal market.

The main priorities of our Tourism Intergroup are sustainability, connectivity, promotion of Europe in long haul markets, taxation, education of workers in the industry; to name just a few. We organise several events and invite different experts from all over Europe, the European Commission, NGOs, etc., and give them the opportunity to introduce us their point of view on sustainable tourism, present their good practices, challenges and priorities.

In July we organised "Green and Blue Tourism" event, how to explore the potential of blue and green tourism in the EU, focusing on costal and marine tourism, where we also hosted your colleague from EUROPARC Federation, Mrs Carol Ritchie. Among others, I also invited my good colleague Mr Martin Šolar from WWF Adria, who presented parks as opportunities and models for

green tourism focusing mainly on Slovenian Triglav national park. He said that protected areas belong to the nature and people are only guests here, so we have to behave accordingly to the rules of nature and respect them. The importance and role of tourism in parks depend on the type of protected area and its protection, and most importantly management goals. The tourism in protected areas is tolerated to the extent which does not exceed the primary nature protection purpose in the park. One of the sustainable and green forms of the tourism in the parks is definitely ecotourism.

Therefore, I would like to congratulate the Charter on counting 131 protected areas today, with sharing the same principles in conducting their tourism activities, in 16 countries. It is my great pleasure of seeing so many of you here today who present the new and the re-awarded "Charter Parks" and show us how protected areas are working effectively with tourism businesses and tour operators across the network.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you all on behalf of Mrs Comodini Cachia and myself, for all the good work you have done for our nature and I really hope to see you all next year as well. Congratulation!