

European hospitality representatives agree on policy priorities in view of upcoming European elections

Brussels, 26 & 27 October 2023 – HOTREC members and distinguished guests from all over Europe gathered for the 87th General Assembly of the Association.

The event offered a significant occasion for industry leaders to explore pressing concerns – as European hospitality navigates an uncertain landscape with surging energy and food costs and acute labour shortages – and reflect on policy priorities in view of the next European elections (June 2024). On this note, European Commission's Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, addressed participants in a videomessage and stressed that *"we at the Commission understand your sector faces significant hardships and we're working hard and in several directions to help you overcome them."*

The event discussions kicked off with a keynote speech by Wallonia Minister of Tourism Valérie de Bue, who introduced the priorities of the upcoming Belgian presidency of the EU (1 January–30 June 2024). Ms. de Bue stated, *"I am pleased to see the topic of tourism gaining prominence on the European agenda in recent years. During our Presidency, Wallonia will continue to promote tourism as a means of sustainable economic development. We will work with our European partners to support the tourism industry in its dual transition. In this regard, the digitalization of the tourism sector and the development of sustainable tourism will be some of my highest priorities during this semester."*

We later welcomed onstage European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders, who emphasised the crucial role of collaboration between the industry and the Institutions. *"The hospitality sector has always been a cornerstone of our European society and economy. As a world-leading tourism destination, we must live up to today's expectations of consumers and lead the way on digital, sustainable, and responsible tourism. These expectations are also guiding our work at the Commission. We just reached, for example, an agreement on a law aiming to put an end to greenwashing practices. In the coming months, we will present a proposal on package travel, to ensure the sector is also resilient in crisis times."*

The subject of sustained collaboration with the European Institutions was also central to HOTREC's members discussions concerning the upcoming European elections 2024, and the related HOTREC Manifesto – which we will unveil on our annual European Hospitality Day event (29 November). *"In an environment full of challenges for our sector, in view of the upcoming European elections, we join forces to advance our agenda and bring the hospitality sector at the top of the European agenda as it deserves to be."* Stated HOTREC President Alexandros Vassilikos. *"Not only for the financial prosperity of our 2 million businesses across Europe, but with the firm conviction that hospitality is a catalyst for achieving sustainable and inclusive growth and prosperity for our society."*

HOTREC members had a chance to brainstorm on the policy areas that HOTREC will prioritise during the next legislative term 2024-2029 – namely, social affairs, environmental, digital and consumer issues. Among these, sustainability undoubtedly represented a crucial topic for delegates, as European hospitality is committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2050. Participants met at the Aquaponic Farm BIGH Anderlecht – an avantgarde structure in Brussels putting sustainability and reuse at the heart of its operations. They discussed ways for businesses to implement sustainable practices – such as certification programs, menu footprint reduction pledges, ecosystem restoration initiatives, and tree-planting support programs. This and other approaches proposed by HOTREC for the sector to go green are also available in HOTREC's recent study **[A Roadmap to Net Zero for European hospitality](#)**.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to our Belgian members for their exceptional hospitality and warmth. We look forward to reuniting again with our members in Spring 2024 at our next General Assembly in Budapest, Hungary.

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What is HOTREC?

HOTREC is the umbrella association of Hotels, Restaurants, Bars and Cafés and similar establishments in Europe. It brings together 47 national associations in 36 European countries and serves as the voice of the European hospitality industry. HOTREC's mission is to represent and champion the industry's interests towards the EU and international institutions, foster knowledge sharing and best practices among its members to promote innovation and serve as an expert platform for the hospitality sector.

The European hospitality industry is a vital economic contributor, comprising over 1.8 million businesses and employing more than 9 million people. It plays a vital role in driving economic growth and job creation, contributing approximately 2-3% to the total EU GDP. The industry is characterized by a high level of entrepreneurship, with 99% of businesses classified as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These companies bring innovation, creativity, and a personal touch to the industry.