



Live from Brussels Newsletter

Issue n°103 – 26 May 2021

A message from Ms. Marie Audren, Director General of HOTREC



Dear reader,

Living with Covid-19 has been as challenging as it gets for European hospitality: many establishments are either officially or de facto closed and others are still operating on the brink of disaster.

The pandemic will continue to affect our sector in the coming years, and reopening will require unprecedented coordination among EU institutions and Member States. However, we must keep in mind that **reopening is not the same as recovery**: the impact of the coronavirus on the industry has been seismic, and getting back to pre-Covid-19 levels will be neither instant nor easy.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that European hospitality will prevail.

The relatively rapid roll-out of vaccination programs and the **recent provisional approval** of the so-called '**EU digital Covid Certificate**' already provide us with a light at the end of the tunnel. The latter, in particular, will be essential to help rebuilding customer and traveller confidence.

We at HOTREC also warmly welcomed the appointment of a Director in charge of tourism at the European Commission: Ms. Valentina Superti, whom we thank for sharing her views on the future of tourism and hospitality **in this newsletter**. It is to note that the European Commission also recently **launched the EU Industrial Strategy 2021**, acknowledging the dramatic impact of the pandemic on tourism, prioritising its recovery.

Looking ahead, the sector will need adequate support from the EU until the end of the crisis and beyond. Hospitality businesses will look at their respective governments for a swift implementation of national Recovery Plans, increased stability and financial support.

Further regulating future EU rules on digital marketing will also be of the utmost importance. In this regard, earlier this month, **we welcomed the verdict by the German Supreme Court**, prohibiting Booking.com from imposing 'narrow' price parity clauses on German hotels. An historic milestone for our member, **Hotelverband Deutschland (IHA)**, and for German hoteliers, and setting an important precedent for other European markets.

I believe that our industry has all the potential and the resilience to lead the way into the digital and green transition: the challenges brought forth by the pandemic must become a turning point to an improved 'next normal'. Let's turn our greatest challenge yet into an opportunity!

We hope you will enjoy our newsletter.

Discussing the future of European tourism and hospitality with Ms. Valentina Superti, Director of tourism and proximity at DG GROW

@VSuperti @EU_Growth #EUTourism #EURecovery



Ms. Valentina Superti is Director at the European Commission DG GROW (Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs). She is responsible for tourism, textiles, social economy and the digitalisation of industry. Her previous responsibilities include being Director for Single Market and Deputy Head of Cabinet of European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, in charge of Industry, SMEs, Galileo and Copernicus.

1. Let us first congratulate you on your new role as Director of tourism and proximity at DG GROW. We are glad that the European Commission appointed a Director in charge of tourism and look forward to a continued collaboration to help the industry get back to pre-coronavirus levels. In this regard, what are your expectations for the upcoming summer season, and how long do you foresee it will take for the sector to recover after COVID-19?

I share my hopes and expectations for the upcoming summer season with most of you – to be able to travel and enjoy a more “normal” summer. Thanks to the great efforts made by all – Member States, industry, the many SMEs operating in tourism, and the European institutions – the tourism ecosystem has a window of opportunity to reboot and recover. Of course, the situation remains difficult and worrisome. Nevertheless, I believe that we finally can see a light at the end of the tunnel.

While the vaccination campaigns are accelerating across Europe, the Green Digital certificate aims to facilitate smooth travelling across borders and the voluntary **sanitary seal for EU tourism and hospitality establishments**, recently finalised by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), should boost travellers’ confidence.

The Commission has also been operating the **“Re-Open EU”** platform and app almost for a year now. It centralises updated travel information from Member States in an interactive map. Its

website is a great success, with over 10 million visits since last June. With its new, “journey planning” functionality, it will continue providing reliable information on the pandemic and various restrictions and rules in place.

Obviously, we need to think beyond the summer season, longer-term. We know that the full recovery of the tourism ecosystem will take time; how long is impossible to say, but some experts estimate that 2019 levels will only be reached by 2024.

In this context, it has to be reminded that, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the EU has provided unprecedented emergency support for tourism: injecting liquidity, making full use of the flexibility of state aid rules and launching a temporary unemployment programme. The Recovery and Resilience Facility and the new Multiannual Financial Framework are also aimed at supporting the recovery.

The key to tourism recovery is collaboration and a forward-looking responsible attitude. We want to build back tourism activities in a socially, economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable manner. Current challenges for sustainable tourism include a still not sufficient level of awareness of the sustainability challenge, there is a need for new skills, there is a diversity of available sustainability schemes, in addition to the seasonal dependency of regions on tourism, and a lack of common tools to measure and compare progress. For example, it is estimated that up to 25% of jobs in tourism are in need of upskilling and reskilling. In order to support the green and digital transition of the tourism ecosystem, the Commission is pursuing a Pact for skills as a shared engagement model in the tourism ecosystem. This is one of the measures where we are calling for the private sector to collaborate.

2. Earlier this month, the European Commission updated its [European Industrial Strategy](#): can you explain to us what is the Commission's objective for tourism and how the upcoming strategy will help rebuild the sector and lay a strong foundation for the future?

With the update of the European Industrial Strategy, the Commission presents a more assertive approach to realise the industrial ambition we share for our continent. It includes a number of aspects that are particularly relevant for the tourism ecosystem – such as the strong focus on SMEs. We must protect them from unnecessary administrative constraints and take into account their needs: recapitalisation and support in the triple transition: green, digital and resilient. We, therefore, propose to focus on their financing, with dedicated capital support and a new Solvency Support Instrument.

Furthermore, the Strategy features an analysis of the tourism ecosystem and announces “transition pathways” for industrial ecosystems co-created with stakeholders. These pathways will identify the actions needed to achieve the green and digital transitions. Given the important impact of the crisis on the tourism sector, and the need to accelerate its recovery, the first transition pathway will be devoted to tourism. The cooperation of HOTREC and its members will be instrumental to the setting out of this pathway.

3. As Director of tourism and proximity, you have a wide-ranging portfolio, with digitalization and innovation being key priorities. What is your take on the digital and green transition and its impact on European tourism? How can data underpin a more resilient, safe, and reassuring experience for tourists? What role can the Commission play in ensuring a level playing field across the sector?

We all know that the capacity of tourism businesses to transform has been dented by the pandemic. But from what I see, there is eagerness from the industry to seize the opportunities of the green and digital transition. This also reflects changing consumer needs: tourists are increasingly looking for greener holidays, less crowded destinations, we want to be closer to nature and leave a lower environmental footprint. A major challenge I see for tourism businesses is how to leverage this change and turn it into opportunities.

Further private-public investments must be mobilised to support the transition. In this endeavour, the EU funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the new Multiannual Financial Framework can play a crucial role. We hope that Member States and the tourism industry will seize these unprecedented opportunities.

We will be doing our best to help. To assist tourism stakeholders in accessing the financing opportunities in the coming years and identifying the right tools of support, the Commission launched on 12 May a new [online guide to the EU funding for tourism](#). This guide promotes the broad variety of funding opportunities available for public and private tourism actors, not forgetting the SMEs. I hope this guide will be helpful to as many tourism businesses as possible.

4. Over the past year, HOTREC teamed up with industry partners in the tourism and hospitality ecosystem to help bring hope to millions of companies, SMEs, and workers. We stand [#TogetherForHospitality](#) to contribute to its recovery. Can you address a message to our sector and the organizations supporting it at these difficult times?

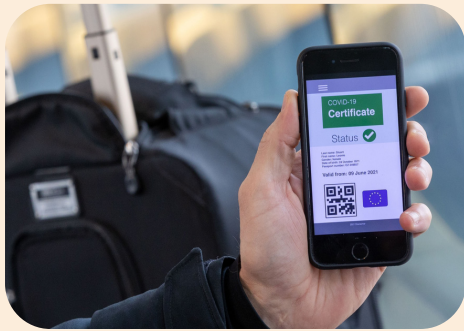
We all know that the pandemic crisis has hit hard the tourism sector and that this has affected millions of jobs and families. We also know that travelling and freedom to travel are important for Europeans.

At the same time, we are in a crucial moment for the transformation of the tourism ecosystem. We have the momentum of the recovery, the need for change driven by citizens, the awareness of Member States and the availability of EU funds.

Tourism and hospitality companies will recover from the pandemic; I warmly invite the HOTREC sector and organizations to be part of the change, by making choices that respect nature, culture and the needs of the citizens and tourism enterprises for a safe and sustainable European hospitality sector.

European Digital Green Certificate: provisional agreement reached

Tags: #DigitalGreenCertificate #EUTourism #hospitality



On 20 May 2021, the European Council and Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the European Digital Green Certificate, which will be called the '**EU digital Covid Certificate**'.

The main outcome of the negotiations confirmed that the certificate will be available in either digital or paper format and it will attest that a person has been vaccinated against the coronavirus, has a recent negative test result or has recovered from the infection.

With regard to testing costs, the European Commission announced the mobilisation of €100 million from the European Emergency Instrument (ESI) to help Member States fund the tests.

Member States also agreed that no additional travel restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic – such as quarantine, self-isolation or testing – should be imposed *“unless they are necessary and proportionate to safeguard public health”*. It is to note that this part of the text is not legally binding.

It was also agreed that Member States must accept vaccination certificates issued in the other Member States for persons inoculated with a vaccine authorised for use in the EU by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). It will be up to the Member States to decide whether they also accept vaccination certificates authorised by the other Member States following national procedures or for vaccines listed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for emergency use.

The EU Council and Parliament will now adopt the text in the upcoming days. The certificate is **expected to be applicable from 1 July 2021 onwards**.

HOTREC very much welcomes the swift adoption of the agreement. However, we call on the EU to extend the financing of tests to tourism travellers and hope that the Council will adopt as soon as possible a Recommendation on lifting travel restrictions within the EU. Only in this way, the summer season can restart strongly!

Coreper approves draft conclusions on future of tourism in Europe to 2030

Tags: #EUTourism #hospitality #EUREcovery

On Wednesday 12 May, Member States' ambassadors to the European Union (Coreper I) approved draft conclusions of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council for tourism in Europe. The Competitiveness Council will adopt this text on 27 May. The main outcome of the conclusions is the following:

- EU and its Member States are to move towards a collective and well-coordinated response to the current pandemic and possible future crises.
- Member States are to develop sustainable, responsible and resilient tourism policies and strategies and share ideas on how the tourism ecosystem can contribute to achieving the **EU Green Deal** objectives.
- Promoting new technologies, digitalisation, ICT and data-sharing to enhance the performance of tourism businesses, the value of tourism destinations.
- Protecting SMEs and micro-enterprises as drivers for social and economic convergence contributing to balanced regional development and job creation.
- Promoting quality education and skills development.
- The EU is to ensure the existence and use of funding opportunities under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU to support the short-, medium- and



long-term recovery of the tourism ecosystem, make it more resilient and support the green and digital transition.

- The Commission, Member States and relevant stakeholders are invited to design a European Agenda for tourism 2030/2050.

HOTREC welcomes the Council conclusions and has confidence the tourism of the future will continue to be robust, sustainable and an example of job creation.

Europe reopens steadily its doors to tourism from third countries

Tags: #Travel #EUTourism #COVID19

The Foreign Affairs Council meeting approved on 20 May 2021 the **EU recommendation on non-essential travel to the EU**, which aims to open the EU to more tourists from third countries – especially those who are vaccinated and come from a zone considered to be safe by the EU.

The revision is based on the **Commission proposal** launched on 3 May 2021.

According to the Recommendation, the epidemiological threshold is now 75 cases/100,000 population – which is more flexible than the current threshold of 25 cases. This will open up the possibility for more tourists to travel to the EU without restrictions on testing or quarantine unless the member country requires it.

For vaccinated tourists, the formula adopted is to accept all tourists from third countries who have been vaccinated with **two doses** and to **lift the testing and quarantine measures for them, if they have received a vaccine recognised by the European Agency**. Member States will also be able to accept vaccinated tourists who have received a **WHO-recognised vaccine, if so they wish**.

Nevertheless, Member States will continue having the possibility to test and/or quarantine tourists arriving on their soil from these countries.

In case variants of the virus will emerge, Member States can launch an '**Emergency brake**', as well as coordinated restriction measures.

HOTREC fully welcomes the Council Recommendation and hopes that the current list of countries whose nationals can come to the EU will be extended in the coming days.

European Industrial Strategy launched

Tags: #EUTourism #EUGreenDeal #digital

On 5 May 2021, the European Commission launched the **EU Industrial Strategy**. The strategy includes tourism as part of the EU ecosystem and recognises the dramatic impact of the crisis on the sector.

The main objectives of the Strategy include: strengthening Single Market resilience; dealing with the EU's strategic dependencies; and accelerating the twin transitions.

The 2020 Industrial Strategy announced actions to support the **green and digital transitions of the EU industry**, but the pandemic has drastically affected the speed and scale of this transformation. Therefore, the Commission outlines new measures to support the business case for the green and digital transition. Said measures include: creating transition pathways in partnership with industry, public authorities, social partners and other stakeholders; providing a regulatory framework to achieve the objectives of **Europe's Digital Decade** and the 'Fit for 55' ambitions; providing SMEs with Sustainability Advisors and supporting data-driven business models; and investing in **upskilling and reskilling to support the twin transitions**.

The **annual single market report** accompanying the Communication dedicates a full section to tourism. It recalls some of the fundamental EU funding opportunities for the tourism sector: CRII+/ERDF/ESF/CEF; Horizon Europe; Digital Europe; Invest EU. It also mentions initiatives to help the sector overcome the crisis, namely:

- Encourage digital transformation (through data-sharing; better access of tourism businesses to online platforms and implementation of the 2019 Regulation on platform-to-business Regulation; the role of EU tourism statistics Regulation; potential tourism dashboard).
- Options for swift adoption of visa digitalisation.
- Green transformation (e.g. renewable energy, sustainable water management); sustainability measurement frameworks (e.g. environmental footprint tracker), labels (e.g. Ecolabel); a dedicated forum for stakeholder cooperation (European Tourism Sustainability Platform); the Renovation Wave – which offers opportunities to make tourism infrastructure more energy efficient.

HOTREC welcomes a more sustainable and digital tourism sector. But defends that appropriate incentives and funding need to be provided to the hospitality sector. The current circumstances do not allow for other option.

European Commission launches EU funding guide on tourism

Tags: #EUTourism #RestartTourism #COVID19

On 12 May 2021, the European Commission launched the **Guide on EU Funding for tourism**.

The guide includes a wide range of funding programmes included in the **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 & Next Generation EU** budget and aims at helping national associations/companies find appropriate funding.

For inspiration, examples funded by previous EU programmes are also included in the guide.

If you are interested in submitting a project, please take into account the following steps:

- Identify the relevant programmes and financial instruments.
- Get familiar with the call-specific forms documentation (online).
- Find partners if useful or required.
- Submit your proposal, offer or application on time.

Please note that **not all programs have already been approved by Council and the European Parliament**. The guide will continue being updated accordingly.

HOTREC very much welcomes the guide and hopes that this will facilitate SME's to access EU funding.



HOTREC welcomes German court verdict prohibiting narrow price parity clauses

Tags: #Digital #Distribution #Competition

On 19 May, the German Supreme Court issued a landmark verdict prohibiting the 'narrow' best price clauses imposed by booking portal Booking.com on hotels. The court **determined that these clauses infringe antitrust law in Germany**.

The overwhelming European hotel booking portal market leader Booking.com will not be allowed to prevent hotels in Germany from advertising lower room prices on their own websites anymore. Hotels in Germany will now be in a position to offer better prices via their own websites, should they wish to do so, to the benefit of hotels and consumers.

HOTREC warmly welcomed the verdict in a **press release**, highlighting the importance of the news for German hoteliers and the significance of the verdict with regard to future EU rules on digital markets. HOTREC congratulated its Member organisation IHA for its resolute and determined action throughout this legal saga and applauded the German Federal Cartel Office for ensuring that competition law is upheld and developing **through evidence to demonstrate the anti-competitive nature of price parity clauses**.

Hotelverband Deutschland (IHA) had triggered the Cartel Office proceedings against Booking.com with a complaint in autumn 2013. In a cease-and-desist order issued on December 22, 2015, the Federal Cartel Office prohibited the booking portal from further use of best-price clauses – both in the form of broad rate parity (no more favourable rates on any other booking channel) and in the form of narrow rate parity (no more favourable rates on the hotel's own website).

The German Federal Cartel Office was the first competition authority worldwide to rightly classify the narrow parity clauses used by Booking.com since summer 2015 as being in violation of antitrust law. Booking.com's appeal against this decision was surprisingly successful at first instance before the Düsseldorf Higher

Regional Court on June 4, 2019. The Federal Cartel Office has now succeeded in obtaining a review of the Düsseldorf ruling before the Federal Court of Justice via a non-admission appeal that was decided positively on July 14, 2020.

In Europe, bans on narrow price parity clauses have been banned by law in Austria, Belgium, France and Italy. Switzerland is expected to be the next European country to outlaw such practices.

ISO and CEN publish COVID-19 prevention guidelines for tourism sector

Tags: [#COVID19](#) [#Health](#) [#Standardisation](#)

On 19 May 2021, the European Standardisation Organisation (CEN) published a European standardisation deliverable for COVID-19 health and safety protocols in tourism establishments and services, developed at the Commission's initiative. It complements CEN's endorsement of a safety protocol developed at the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO), which was adopted on the previous day (18 May) and to which HOTREC extensively contributed.

The CWA 5643 series is composed of two parts. First, the endorsement by CEN of the **ISO PAS 5643** 'Measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the tourism industry', which contains requirements and recommendations for various tourism enterprises and locations.

Second, a CEN Workshop Agreement (CWA) 'Guidelines and requirements to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the tourism industry – Part 2' offers a **dedicated European label** and clarifies minimum requirements for a quality assurance mechanism.

EU countries now have the opportunity to award the label, making use of various EU funding possibilities. tourism service providers can use the protocols of the ISO PAS 5643 only or opt on that basis for labelling under the CWA, if and as provided for by national competent authorities.

European Commission launches Communication on Blue Economy

Tags: [#Sustainability](#) [#EUGreenDeal](#)



On 17 May 2021, the European Commission launched a new Communication for a sustainable blue economy in the EU (**COM(2021)240final**). A sustainable blue economy is essential to achieving the objectives of the **European Green Deal** and ensuring a green and inclusive recovery from the pandemic.

The objective is for **coastal tourism and other sectors to decrease their environmental and climate impact**.

The **Communication** sets out a detailed agenda for the blue economy to:

- **Achieve the objectives of climate neutrality and zero pollution:** notably by developing offshore renewable energy, decarbonising maritime transport and greening ports.
- **Support climate adaptation and coastal resilience:** adaptation activities – such as developing green infrastructure in coastal areas and protecting coastlines from the risk of erosion and flooding – will help preserve biodiversity and landscapes while benefitting tourism and the coastal economy.
- **Ensure sustainable food production:** sustainable production of and new marketing standards for seafood, use of algae and seagrass, stronger fisheries control as well as research and innovation in cell-based seafood will help to preserve Europe's seas.

The European Commission and Investment Bank Group will increase their cooperation on a sustainable blue economy. Moreover, the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund – especially with its **'BlueInvest' platform** and the new **BlueInvest Fund** – will support the transition towards more sustainable value chains based on the oceans, seas and coastal activities.

HOTREC hopes that Member States have included investments for a sustainable blue economy in their national resilience and recovery plans as well as their national operational programmes for various EU-funds from now to 2027.

European Parliament presents its report on Minimum Wages

Tags: [#SocialAffairs](#)

In April 2021, the co-rapporteurs Dennis Radtke (EPP/Germany) and Agn  s Jongerius (S&D/Netherlands) presented their **joint report** on the proposal for a Directive on Minimum Wages.

The report mentions an increase in the obligation of collective bargaining coverage from 70% to 90%, and indicates that minimum wages below an indicative reference value of 60% of the gross median wage and 50% of the gross average wage shall be considered inadequate. It also indicates that variations or deductions to the minimum wages would not be allowed. Trade unions are to be provided with different rights.

HOTREC considers that the report goes much beyond what is legally allowed by the Treaties – namely the prohibition of including variations and deductions and the inclusion of international indicators in the articles.

We also consider that including a percentage of collective bargaining coverage goes against legal certainty principles. At the same time, Member States where collective bargaining is not strong for the time being would not be able to reach 90% coverage (not even 70% coverage).

Rights to trade unions do not respect the diversity of national industrial relations systems nor the fact that representation is for the national level to decide.

Porto summit: EU leaders and social partners subscribe action plan on European Pillar of Social Rights

Tags: [@2021PortugalEU](#) [#SocialAffairs](#)

On 8 May 2021, European leaders adopted the **declaration of the Porto Social Summit**, which renews their commitment to putting into practice the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and approves the **Action Plan** presented in March by the European Commission.

EU leaders welcomed the “*main targets*” of the Action Plan (including employment, training and reducing the risk of poverty) and recognised the role of the ‘European Semester’ budget process in achieving them.

The key messages are the following:

- The EU should target jobs, skills and poverty reduction (SME's play a key role).
- The European Pillar of Social Rights is a fundamental element of the recovery and its implementation will support reaching digital, green and fair transition.
- It should continue being implemented with proportionality and in respect of subsidiarity.
- Education and skills will be put at the centre of political action.
- The success of European social dialogue is encouraged.

The Porto summit also counted with **a commitment** signed between the EU institutions and the social partners, following the lines of the Porto declaration.

HOTREC and TOPOSOPHY webinar explores 'new normal' tourism in urban areas

Tags: @TOPOSOPHY #Events #Digital #Sustainability #LiveFromTheNetwork



HOTREC partnered up with TOPOSOPHY on 29 April 2021 to host a seminar on the recovery of urban tourism. The webinar covered the challenges cities and urban hospitality establishments are now facing to restore confidence among visitors and residents and to breathe life back into city centres and neighbourhoods.

Digitalisation, sustainability and innovation were prominent themes throughout the presentations delivered by speakers Amaryllis Verhoeven (European Commission), Peter Jordan and Steve Lowy (TOPOSOPHY), Marie Audren (HOTREC) and Alexandros Vassilikos (President of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels). Key messages closely echoed those heard a few days

earlier during the European Parliament debate on the recovery of the hospitality sector.

European Commission Head of Unit Amaryllis Verhoeven called for greater transparency and data sharing among cities and local businesses, while hotel sector experts Steve Lowy and Alexandros Vassilikos highlighted how innovation can boost hospitality's contribution to local well-being and cohesion.

What's next

In the HOTREC Team's and membership's agenda

31 May-4 June 2021 – EU Green Week

31 May 2021 – Hotelstars Union General Assembly

1 June 2021 – HOTREC 82nd General Assembly

1 July 2021 – Start of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council



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