

Dear Speaker,
Dear Co-Chairs,
Representatives of the European Parliament and of the Commission,
Esteemed guests from international organizations,
Dear participants,

Thank you for the invitation to address this conference as a representative of the Slovenian parliament.

I come from the country nearby – from the green Slovenia which just like our host Croatia is blessed with sites of outstanding natural beauty and rich cultural heritage.

Slovenia is a country of astonishing natural diversity where the mountain world of the Alps meets the Mediterranean, the Pannonian plain, and one of the most unique landscapes of the world – the Karst. We often say that despite its small size, in terms of natural geography, Slovenia is a kind of Europe in miniature.

Our country is distinguished by:

- high mountains, picturesque lakes, underground caves,
- mighty waterfalls, medicinal thermal and mineral springs,
- well preserved forests covering over 60% of the territory, and
- a small, but particularly fascinating piece of sea shore.

Recently, however, Slovenia and Europe have found themselves in a situation where the beauty of nature is not enough. Boosting economic growth is urgent and needed to achieve the material and social welfare of the population. We indeed aim at a successful economy, yet not at any cost, particularly not at the cost of reducing biodiversity or to the detriment of the environment.

For such reason, we strive for a socially and environmentally responsible economy. In the current circumstances, Slovenia sees tourism as one of the key driving forces of economic growth and employment, while tourist-oriented and sustainable development represents an opportunity for the country to preserve its exceptional natural beauty and cultural heritage also for future generations.

Our commitment to sustainable tourism is enshrined also in the 2012-2016 Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy, stipulating that up to 2016 the Slovenian tourism will be entirely based on sustainable development.

I am therefore particularly favourable and supportive to all measures, initiatives and efforts at the local, regional and EU levels which will contribute to a more effective search for balance between

- economic growth and welfare on the one hand, and
- respect for and conservation of the environment on the other.

I am aware that our efforts alone do not suffice to successfully address environmental challenges and sustainable development issues at the local level. I therefore consider today's meeting as an opportunity to enhance coordination and cooperation, a possibility to share good practices and find common ways to tackle the key challenge, i.e. a well-considered exploitation of natural heritage, a healthy environment, and preservation of nature for all generations to come.

Thank you for your attention. I wish all the participants a successful conference.