

Agenda item 3:

Report of the UN Tourism Secretary-General: Global Vision and Regional Approach

Address of the Secretary-General to the 72nd Meeting of the Commission for Europe, 13 May 2026

Dear Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

It is my absolute privilege to present my first report to this Commission. To meet you face to face. To speak clearly. And to speak frankly.

Because let's be honest. This is a defining moment for our sector. Yesterday, we spoke about the climate emergency. Destinations are already feeling the impact of rising temperatures. And war, insecurity, distrust. These are not distant headlines. They are pressures shaping the world our people travel through. And they risk bringing progress to a standstill.

So we cannot look at the world outside these walls and think, "Now is the time for business as usual."

No. Now is the time to rethink old assumptions. To strengthen the partnerships that matter. And to be honest about what is no longer working.

My vision is built around four priorities. They are on the screen now. And Europe is central to every single one of them. Not watching from the side. Not here just to observe. But central to everything we are trying to build.

Because five months into this mandate, I do not want us to be measured by ambition alone. I want us to be judged by what we deliver. That was true in my twenty years in the private sector. And it is true here. So let's begin.

Priority Number One: Stronger Foundations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ambition without solid foundations is just noise. Before we talk about transformation, we must make sure the fundamentals are strong. Governance. Accountability. Communication. Because when trust breaks down, institutions weaken. And Europe has a critical role to play in all three. It can lead by example.

Our friends in Andorra are doing exactly that. Dear Christel, good to see you! We've supported Andorra in developing your first general tourism law. It was recently approved by your National Parliament, right? Could you please share with us, why this matters? For visitors to Andorra, but above all, for workers and communities.

Representative of Andorra intervenes.

Thank you, Christel.

Europe has shown that strong tourism governance is possible. Now we must scale it across the region.

Europe already has some of the world's most advanced frameworks for governance and accountability. And that is why this region is helping lead the way in embracing our International Code for the Protection of Tourists. Six European Members, most recently Ukraine and Malta, now adhere to the Code. That is more than a legal framework. It is a statement. A statement that the biggest challenges must be faced head on, with clear, harmonized and transparent rules.

We also listened to your concerns about short term rentals. Our colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina were among the Members calling for this to be part of our Agenda for Europe. Dear Jelica, where are you? Could you tell us how can we find the right balance between a thriving tourism economy and strong happy communities?

Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina intervenes.

Thank you, Jelica. I am pleased to say that our recommendations are already helping seven Member States in Europe navigate this rapidly evolving market.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An organisation that asks its Members to lead by example must do exactly the same. We cannot ask for transparency from others and tolerate a lack of this ourselves. The standards we promote internationally must also define us internally.

The support we provide, including through Technical Assistance, must be clear, consistent and accountable. I am now working on a mandate for our Regional and Thematic Offices, including the office in Uzbekistan. That will be presented at our Executive Council next month.

And let me say something clearly about communication. I want this Organisation to be visible again, trusted again and confident in its voice again. Because if we are doing important work for people, then people should see it. And the world should know about it. I have already begun investing in the people and tools to make that happen.

And communication will not be a one-way street. Our doors will remain open. We recognise the vital importance of transparency and accountability. They are at the heart of European values, and they are at the heart of my mandate.

And now, Priority Number Two: Greater and more effective collaboration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

80% of all international arrivals in Europe come from within the region. That is the foundation of shared opportunity. And our Regional Department for Europe is driven by that same spirit.

I have already welcomed some of you to our Madrid headquarters and many of you have welcomed me to your countries. Those relationships matter. Because progress is still built person to person, country to country, trust to trust. But our collective goals are also being advanced through shared initiatives, not least our Agenda for Europe.

At the same time, I am expanding our engagement beyond Member States alone. Let me give you just one example.

In January, at the very start of my mandate, I was in Brussels. For many years, we have been knowledge partners for the European Commission. Now I want us to go further. To move from knowledge to action. We are joined today by Marlene from the European Commission. Marlene, could you briefly share with us, how can UN Tourism help support the implementation of the European Union's new Tourism Strategy?

Representative of the European Commission intervenes.

Thank you, Marlene.

In recent weeks, we have also strengthened our collaboration with the European Travel Commission. And that partnership is built on one simple truth: Without good data, good policy becomes impossible. So our cooperation is focused on sharing data and intelligence, strengthening crisis monitoring, and expanding opportunity for rural destinations.

That is the kind of collaboration we want. Not just inside conference rooms, but out in the real world.

Strategic outreach to non-Members is a priority. I want this Organisation reaching further. Building trust with non-Members, demonstrating the value of cooperation and encouraging more countries to join our shared mission.

At the same time, I want to deepen our cooperation with the private sector. Right now, 50 percent of our Affiliate Members come from Europe. And we are growing this network. But growth alone is not enough. We want quality, impact and real engagement.

Finally, I am deepening our relationships across the UN system. Let me share just a few examples of how we are already delivering tangible results.

In March, I was in Paris to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO. That agreement will strengthen cooperation around culture, inclusion and youth engagement.

And with the Food and Agriculture Organization, we expect to finalize a joint action plan and sign a new MoU before the end of this year. That will be an important step forward for rural tourism, heritage preservation and local communities across Europe.

And now, my third: Upskilling.

Right now, some countries in Europe face youth unemployment rates of up to 25 percent. At the same time, our sector is struggling with recruitment and retention. Not because the talent is missing. It is there. The problem is access, opportunity and the bridge between education and employment.

So we are building that bridge. Let me show you how.

Last month, I was in Uzbekistan. I visited our Academy in Samarkand. And I met young people whose lives are being changed through education, through opportunity and through tourism. What struck me most was how seriously Uzbekistan is investing in its future. Through the Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage and the Tourism Academy, they are preparing a new generation with practical skills, international knowledge and real global opportunities.

And our partnership matters. Because together, we are helping bring international standards and expertise, not only to Uzbekistan but across the wider Central Asian region.

We are also now in the second year of our joint Degree programme with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and the Swiss Government. Nine out of the ten nationalities represented are European. Students studying across Switzerland and Spain for three years. That reflects this region's deep commitment to education and training.

And sixteen countries in Europe now have institutions with our TedQual certification. Together, they offer seventy programmes linking classrooms directly with workplaces.

And finally, Priority Number Four: Sustainable Tourism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The truth is simple. We no longer have the luxury of delay. Extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common, especially across Southern Europe. And our sector is already feeling the

consequences. In disrupted seasons, rising costs and changing travel behaviour.

For many of you, building resilience is no longer optional. It is essential.

Czechia came to us seeking support in protecting tourism from floods, fires and other climate related threats. Dear Magdalena, could you share with us why this matters now and how innovation can help make destinations safer?

Representative of Czechia intervenes.

Thank you.

I am now focusing much of our collective energy on 2027, the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism. We recently shared the roadmap for the Year. It is our call to action. And I invite every Member State here to help shape and deliver it.

And here in Malta, we are also sharing the symbol of the year with you. It is a dandelion. Grounded in nature, built around a simple idea.

Good ideas are like seeds. If we protect them, they grow. If we share them, they spread. And if we work together, they can transform entire communities.

And I want Europe to be the wind behind them. Because this region continues to lead by example.

Take our International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories. Of the forty observatories worldwide, fifteen are here in Europe.

And we have just welcomed twenty six new Villages from seventeen European countries into our global network. We are now working with the European Travel Commission to feature them on the Visit Europe platform. A major opportunity for visibility and growth.

That shows Europe is serious about protecting heritage, communities and identity. But this region is also helping pioneer new solutions for sustainability. Let me give you one example:

Our hosts here in Malta are focusing on heat mitigation. A challenge that increasingly affects destinations across the world. And this week, we held the final of our Heat Mitigation Challenge. Because we hear your concerns. And we are committed to helping Members find practical shared solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Those are my four priorities. And if we get this right, we will not simply improve an organisation. We will help shape a stronger future for tourism itself. A future where tourism creates opportunity. Where it protects culture, not simply consumes it. Where it strengthens communities, instead of weakening them. And where people, wherever they come from, still feel something increasingly rare in today's world.

Connection. Trust. Belonging. That is the mandate before us. Not only to grow tourism. But to give it greater purpose.

And Europe has a defining role to play in that mission. Because when this region leads, the world pays attention. So let us lead with courage. Lead with honesty. And above all, lead together.

Because the future of tourism will not be shaped by fear. It will be shaped by what we choose to build together.

Thank you very much.