



Welcome Address

European Conference on Sustainable Tourism Celebrating 20 Years of CSTI Leadership in Sustainability (2006–2026)

Distinguished European Commissioners and Deputy Ministers,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,
Honourable Members of Parliament and Representatives of the European Institutions,
Honourable Commissioner for the Environment and Animal Welfare,
Distinguished Municipal and Community Leaders,
Respected Bishop of Mesaoria,
Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

It is with deep pride and a strong sense of responsibility that I welcome you today, on behalf of the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative, to this European Conference on Sustainable Tourism — a gathering that marks not only an anniversary, but a moment of reflection and renewal.

Twenty years ago, in 2006, sustainability in tourism was a forward-looking ambition. Today, in 2026, it is the defining condition for our sector's survival and success.

For two decades, CSTI has worked to transform sustainability from principle into practice — from policy discussion into measurable impact. What began as a national initiative has evolved into a platform for European dialogue, innovation, and cooperation.

But this conference is not about looking back. It is about looking forward.

We meet at a decisive time for Europe.

The European Commission has placed sustainability at the very core of Europe's growth strategy through the European Green Deal — a bold commitment to climate neutrality, biodiversity protection, circular economy transformation, and social fairness.

The *Fit for 55* legislative package sets binding targets that will reshape transport, energy, infrastructure, and industry — all of which affect tourism.

In this context, the Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans plays a particularly important role, as sustainable maritime policy, ocean protection, and blue economy initiatives are directly connected to coastal and maritime tourism, which remain vital pillars of Europe's tourism ecosystem.

Tourism does not stand outside this transformation.
Tourism must lead within it.



As a sector representing nearly 10% of EU GDP and employment, tourism holds extraordinary power — power to regenerate local economies, to protect natural landscapes, to preserve cultural identity, and to foster intercultural understanding.

But it also carries responsibility.

Responsibility to reduce carbon intensity.

Responsibility to support climate adaptation in vulnerable destinations.

Responsibility to safeguard biodiversity.

Responsibility to ensure that growth is inclusive and equitable.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals provide us with a universal compass. Sustainable tourism is directly linked to **United Nations SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)**, **SDG 13 (Climate Action)**, **SDG 14 (Life Below Water)**, and **SDG 15 (Life on Land)**. Equally important is **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)**, which reminds us that none of these objectives can be achieved in isolation. Sustainable tourism thrives on collaboration — between governments, the private sector, local communities, academia, and international organizations — working together to create lasting impact.

Our mission at CSTI has always been aligned with these principles — long before sustainability became mainstream policy language.

Over the past 20 years, we have learned three essential lessons:

First, sustainability must be measurable.

Aspirations must translate into standards, monitoring, and accountability.

Second, sustainability must be collaborative.

Governments, businesses, communities, academia, and travellers must move in the same direction.

Third, sustainability must be regenerative.

It is no longer sufficient to “do less harm.” We must actively restore ecosystems, strengthen communities, and build climate resilience.

Cyprus, situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, is uniquely aware of both the opportunities and vulnerabilities of tourism. Rising temperatures, water scarcity, and biodiversity pressures are not theoretical risks for us — they are lived realities.

This is why our commitment is unwavering.

As we look toward the next 20 years, we must ask ourselves:



Can Europe become the global benchmark for sustainable tourism?
Can we lead the world in green destination - management, low-carbon mobility, circular hospitality models, and climate-resilient coastal development?
Can we ensure that digital transformation supports — rather than undermines — sustainability objectives?

I firmly believe the answer is yes.

But only if we act collectively.

Only if sustainability becomes embedded in investment decisions, financing mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks.

Only if we support small and medium enterprises — the backbone of European tourism — in this transition.

The future of tourism in Europe will not be defined by volume, but by value.

Not by expansion alone, but by resilience.

Not by short-term returns, but by long-term stewardship.

Today, as we celebrate 20 years of CSTI leadership, we reaffirm our commitment to aligning Cyprus and Europe's tourism future with the European Green Deal, with climate neutrality goals, and with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let this conference be a turning point — not simply a commemoration.

Let it be the moment where we move from sustainability as strategy to sustainability as identity.

On behalf of the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our distinguished participants. Your partnership, your vision, and your leadership are invaluable as we work together to advance sustainable tourism.

As Helen Keller once said, "**Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much**", we can ensure that tourism in Europe becomes a force not only for economic prosperity — but for environmental regeneration, social cohesion, and intergenerational responsibility.

Welcome to this conference, and may our discussions shape the next chapter of sustainable tourism in Europe.

Thank you.

Philippos Drousiotis
Executive Chairman