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GENERAL POLICY ISSUES

Interview of Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)



Mr Taleb Rifai is serving as Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) since 1 January 2010. HOTREC asked him three questions on the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, on safety and security in tourism and on UNWTO's activities concerning the digitalisation of the tourism sector.

1)The United Nations General Assembly has decided that 2017 will be the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Which objectives does the UNWTO intend to achieve during this important year and what can organisations such as HOTREC do to help the UNWTO reach its objectives?

The designation by the United Nations General Assembly of 2017 as International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development is a great recognition of the contribution of our sector in creating jobs and prosperity, fostering better understanding among peoples and in leading greater awareness on cultural and environmental preservation. The International Year is thus a unique opportunity to advance **the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental-** and to build common action in that regard. We invite all to join us in this celebration and have developed a Roadmap where we define the various actions that can be done including awareness raising actions, research activities, events, creation of awards that promote sustainability in tourism, and many others

HOTREC for example could develop actions aimed at hospitality staff to raise their awareness of issues such as energy, join the awareness raising campaign for consumers or create a special award for members promoting any area of sustainability.

2) With the multiplication in 2015 and 2016 of terrorist attacks in major tourism destinations, such as France, Turkey or Thailand among others, security has become a hot issue for the tourism community. What can the UNWTO do to help tackling this challenge?

Safety and security have been always a major preoccupation for the international tourism community as these are essential components of tourism development. Recent events have shown that we live a global challenge which leaves no destination immune. This situation requires increased cooperation among nations as well as a better integration of the tourism sector in the emergency plans and strategies of destinations and countries. From UNWTO we act on two levels. One supporting our Member States which have suffered from this type of hideous attacks in order to recover as fast as possible and proving them with capacity building in crisis management and communication to better equip them to minimize the negative impact of such events. And two, we work to bring together tourism and security to enhance the so much needed cooperation.

Yet, I must also say that despite the many challenges that we have been facing, tourism is a highly resilient sector that recovers quite fast from crises of different nature. This is clear when we see that in 2015 despite all tragic events around the world, there were 52 million more international tourists travelling as compared to the year before. Actually in the so many cases that we have monitored in the last years what we witnessed is that the impact of these violent actions is of short term nature and that destinations rapidly recover in the medium and long term.

3) Digitalisation is a major disruptor for traditional business models throughout the economy. This is particularly true in the tourism sector where discussions are now focusing on the dominance of Online Travel Agents, the role of travel apps, the rise of the collaborative economy or the importance of big data. How do you see this phenomenon, and can UNWTO help tourism businesses, particularly smaller ones, adapt to this new digital reality? How can HOTREC contribute to UNWTO's work on those issues?

The application of new technologies to tourism is enriching the sector, enhancing business opportunities and facilitating the travel experience in a tremendous manner. UNWTO has been widely advocating the relevance of this phenomenon, a core priority for our Organization, upon governments, the private sector and civil society recipients. Moreover we provide capacity building in areas related to ICTs-associated topics and address this topic at UNWTO events held worldwide. We welcome any actions aimed at supporting these efforts and we sincerely appreciate the dissemination work of HOTREC in this regard, a much valuable partner of UNWTO. In the specific case of the impact of ICT on new business models, UNWTO has been long promoting the value of such evolution while calling for the need to establish a level playing field for

all actors in the sector. In this regard, UNWTO is currently conducting research on the various models being implemented around the world and trust that HOTREC will be a valuable contributor in this new research.

Slovakia takes over the Council Presidency of the EU



On 1st July 2016, Slovakia took over the six-months rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. Its **priorities** will focus on four key areas: economically strong Europe, modern single market, sustainable migration and asylum policies and globally engaged Europe. The Presidency envisages to achieve tangible results, overcome fragmentation and focus on the citizen.

The priorities related with the hospitality sector are the following:

- VAT rules: the aim of the Slovak Presidency in this area is to obtain clear political guidelines from all Member States with regard to the action plan on VAT from April 2016.
- Protecting the Schengen area - the Slovak Presidency aims to support solutions and initiatives for its improvement, namely by protecting the external border (through the deployment of the European Border Guard; by concluding negotiations on the Smart Border Package; and by working on the Visa Code revision);
- Social Affairs – the Council Presidency will focus on the European Pillar of Social Rights (aiming at defining the basic principles to promote fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems, and to promote social convergence); regarding the possible Council Recommendation on establishing a skills guarantee, the Presidency aims to increase the level of adult education, including digital, entrepreneurial and transversal skills; in the context of the revision of the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, the Presidency will prioritise the development of tools and services for skills and qualifications and on improving their comparability.
- Chronic non communicable diseases – the Presidency will work on the importance of prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases by promoting healthy lifestyles;
- Circular economy – The presidency will promote the development of measures directed towards the circular economy, as it considers it essential to reduce waste production and protect the environment, but also to transform how the economy functions, from production and consumption to waste management and the secondary materials market. Increased attention should also be paid to the issue of the efficient use of water.
- Digital Single Market - The Presidency will strive to reach a general approach on the proposal for a Regulation on addressing unjustified geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination on the grounds of place of residence or establishment, or nationality within the single market.

HOTREC position:

- *HOTREC welcomes the Slovakian priorities and wishes the Council Presidency all the success for the six months to come;*
 - *Overall, it is important that Tourism remains at the center of the EU policy making.*
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DIGITAL ISSUES

HOTREC unveils its European hotel distribution study



HOTREC's European hotel distribution study was unveiled on 18 July 2016. Its main conclusions include that the dependency of hotels on Online Travel Agents (OTAs) is on the rise and that there have not been signs for increased competition between OTAs over the past 1 year, contrary to the expectations of competition authorities.

The share in overnights booked via OTAs increased from 19,3% to 22,3% between 2013 and 2015, while the proportion of direct bookings at the hotels declined from 59,4% to 55,2%. Small hotels with fewer than 50 rooms are significantly more dependent on OTAs while, on the other hand, chain hotels are significantly less dependent.

Priceline (Booking.com) remains the leading OTA market player with a relative OTA market share of almost 63%, followed by the Expedia Group with 16,8% (overtaking HRS) and HRS now third with 11,9%.

Most hoteliers in Europe (91,5%) reported not having received a reduction in OTA commission rates since the introduction of the narrow parity clauses in summer 2015. Small and individual hotels were receiving significantly less such a reduction than big hotels or hotel chains. As it was the promise of the narrow parity clauses to increase competition on the OTA market, one of the main signs of increased competition, namely the reduction of commission rates, does not seem apparent on the market.

HOTREC position

- *Given the huge imbalance between the various players (2-3 dominant players vs. 200.000 hotels in Europe), HOTREC calls on DG Competition to act to ensure that market conditions get fairer and more balanced, with the freedom of each and every single hotelier to be able to set their own conditions for their own services. Hoteliers should also be able to fairly negotiate on contract terms and conditions with every distribution partner.*
 - *The narrow parity clauses have increased competition on the OTA market, as the OTA market is getting more and more monopolised and commission rates also are widely unchanged.*
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FOOD

Regulation on Official controls: trilogue agreement adopted



On 15 June 2016, the European Parliament and the Council's Presidency found an agreement in trilogue on the Official Controls Regulation. The agreement was confirmed by the Council's COREPER shortly after and by the ENVI (Environment, Public Health & food Safety) Committee of the European Parliament on 12 July 2016.

The trilogue agreement provides that:

- Inspection fees are not mandatory for hygiene controls in restaurants and other retail premises. However Member States keep the possibility to charge fees if they wish so;
- Member States have the possibility (but not the obligation) to set-up rating schemes on the hygiene performance of food business operators, provided that some conditions are met;
- There is no obligation to publish the result of individual controls (unless there is a clear risk to human health, as provided for in other existing EU Regulations).

Next Steps:

The Council will soon adopt the trilogue agreement as its official 1st reading position. The European Parliament plenary will approve formally the agreement and the Regulation soon after the Council.

HOTREC position:

- *HOTREC welcomes the outcome of the trilogue agreement as it leaves the choice to Member States as whether to charge inspection fees for controls in restaurants or not.*
 - *HOTREC also welcomes the freedom left to Member States authorities on whether to publish the result of individual controls or on whether to set-up rating schemes for the performance of food business operators.*
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Commission consults stakeholders on draft recommendation on the management of acrylamide in food

On 8 July 2016, The European Commission launched a stakeholder consultation on its draft proposal for a Commission Regulation "on the application of codes of good practice to reduce the presence of acrylamide in food". The draft proposal provides that each stakeholder group should abide by its relevant code of practice (which was prepared by the relevant stakeholder organization).

Concerning the hospitality industry:

- They would have to follow HOTREC Code of practice, including the making available to the kitchen staff of the colour guide for French fries
- They would have to make visible to consumers the colour guide for French fries to raise consumer awareness on the danger of acrylamide.

Stakeholders had until 5 September to give their comments on the draft Regulation

Next Steps:

The Commission is expected to fine-tune the Regulation and release its official proposal in the coming weeks.

Actions:

HOTREC, which drafted the code of practice mentioned in the draft Regulation and participated to the stakeholder consultation, will inform its members once the formal proposal is officially published by the Commission.

HOTREC position:

- *Given the potentially carcinogenic effect of acrylamide, HOTREC is taking its responsibility by promoting a flexible code of practice for the restaurant sector, with a focus on concrete and easy to follow recommendations, so as to diminish acrylamide levels in food served by restaurants, without burdening them un-necessarily.*
 - *HOTREC however opposes the obligation for restaurants to make the colour guide on French fries available to consumers. Indeed, hospitality businesses should not be responsible for educating consumers about the safety aspects of the food consumers prepare themselves at home with products provided by other food business operators, as this is the duty of public authorities.*
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Food Waste: battle looming in the European Parliament over binding food waste reduction targets



Following the presentation on 25 May 2016 by the rapporteur MEP Simona Bonafè (S&D, Italy) of her draft report on the Commission proposal to review the Waste Framework Directive, the MEPs member of the ENVI (Environment, Public Health & food Safety) committee tabled in July over a thousand amendments, many of them related to the provisions dealing with the reduction of food waste throughout the food chain.

Based on Member States' pledge at U.N level to achieve a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030, the initial Commission proposal is simply asking Member States to adopt measures to reduce food waste. MEPs from the S&D as well as one MEP from the EPP and from the Greens therefore decided to table amendments to strengthen considerably the Commission's text, by giving Member States an obligation of results to achieve the UN target. On the other side, some EPP members tabled amendments to ensure that the revised Waste Directive would only give Member States an obligation of means to achieve the UN targets, and not an obligation of results.

Besides this issue, many MEPs tabled amendments calling on the Member States to provide financial and fiscal incentives to boost donation by food service businesses to charitable organisations, as advocated by HOTREC.

Next Steps:

The ENVI Committee will discuss these amendments in September with the view to reach a compromise and to adopt (in October) its report on the Commission proposal.

Actions:

HOTREC will contact the relevant MEPs of the ENVI Committee to explain the position of the hospitality industry on the amendments tabled.

HOTREC position:

- *The hospitality industry is a small waster compared to other segment of the food chain, but is nonetheless acting in a responsible manner by promoting best practices to reduce food waste;*
 - *Targets for the reduction of food waste throughout the food chain should remain aspirational and should primarily focus on big wasters.*
 - *Funding should be provided to incentivize the development of schemes meant to collect unsold food in restaurants in view of their re-use as a source of feed or energy. Similar funding should be available for donations to charitable organizations*
 - *Measurement of food waste should be the responsibility of the Member States authorities.*
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VISA POLICY

Full visa waiver reciprocity requested



On 13th July 2016, the European Commission adopted a [Communication regarding the visa reciprocity situation with Canada and the United States](#). The Commission reiterated that achieving full visa waiver reciprocity for citizens of all Member States is a primary objective and a fundamental principle of the common visa policy.

At the moment, citizens from some Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania) still need a visa to enter the U.S and Canada. The Commission stressed that it will continue to work towards full visa reciprocity and will coordinate its activities with the Member States concerned, the European Parliament and the Council to accelerate the delivery of the results.

HOTREC position

- *Currently, travellers from the U.S. and Canada account for the largest percentage of all European arrivals. Arrivals from the two markets reached 30.3 million tourists;*
 - *According to the European Communication COM (2016) 221 final, estimates indicate that a potential decrease of 5% in the number of US/Canadian tourists to the EU, in case the visa waiver would not be applied, would represent a loss of EUR 1.8 billion for the EU tourism sector;*
 - *The economic impact that closing the doors to U.S and Canadian citizens would have for tourism purposes needs to be taken into account, as well as the damage of the external relations between the EU and the U.S and Canada;*
 - *HOTREC encourages the European Commission to continue intense bilateral negotiations with the U.S. and Canada, so that full reciprocity in the application of the visa waiver will also apply to Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania.*
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CONSUMER AFFAIRS

New EU consumer market scoreboard identifies holiday accommodation as the most performing service market in Europe



On 5 September 2016, the European Commission published its 2016 EU Consumer Markets Scoreboard. The Consumer Markets Scoreboard provides an overview of EU citizen's assessment of the performance of key consumer goods and services markets based on data collected in 2015. This year, the holiday accommodation (e.g. hotels) market was ranked by the scoreboard as the most performing service market in Europe when comparing with almost 30 other service markets in the EU.

Moreover, the holiday accommodation market also saw a strong positive evolution (+2.6%) of its performance, reaching a score of 84.4 in the Market Performance Indicator, compared to a score of 78.5 in the overall service sector. The sector of "cafés, bars and restaurants" also experienced good results with a Market Performance Indicator of 81.3, making it the 7th most performing consumer market for the EU Consumer Markets Scoreboard.

The 2016 EU Consumer Markets Scoreboard and its related annexes are available here: [link](#)

HOTREC position

- *HOTREC welcomes the result of the EU Consumer Markets Scoreboard, which unambiguously shows that the hospitality industry delivers optimal services to consumers in Europe in terms of quality and experience.*

HOTREC replies to the EU consultation for the fitness check of the EU consumer and marketing law

On 26 July 2016, HOTREC replied to the European Commission consultation for the fitness check of the EU consumer and marketing law. The consultation was seeking the views of the stakeholders on 6 Directives (the unfair Contract Terms Directive; the Consumer Sales and Guarantees Directive; the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive; the Price Indication Directive; the Misleading and Comparative Advertising Directive; the Injunctions Directive; and the Consumer Rights Directive).

HOTREC position

- *HOTREC welcomes the consultation and provided examples of unfair practices and contractual terms imposed by large companies on small hospitality businesses, which show the need for a protection of SMEs against such behaviour;*
 - *HOTREC also called on the adoption of a clear definition of the collaborative economy and called on the Commission to look at the issue of brand-bidding and brand-grabbing, which strongly penalise SMEs on the online market.*
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STANDARDS

Proposals for ISO standards on Traditional Restaurants and Heritage hotels disapproved at first stage



Recent proposals to develop international standards on Traditional Restaurants and Heritage Hotels have been disapproved at first stage, as there were insufficient number of national standardisation bodies nominating experts to work on such a standard.

According to the internal rules of ISO, as nonetheless more than half of the members voted in favour of the projects, the proposals will now need further fine-tuning before putting them forward to a formal adoption.

Next steps

The proposals will be further improved and probably be put forward to a formal vote.

HOTREC position:

- *HOTREC sent its observations on both proposals saying that they were not well justified and included several requirements, which are far beyond their main aim.*
 - *HOTREC believes that especially in the area of local specificities like ‘what is traditional’ standardisation and even more international standardisation has no role to play.*
 - *Furthermore, HOTREC reiterated its position that standards have to be market driven, meaning that they should only be put forward, if there is a need for their development also from the side of the relevant industry.*
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Proposal for ISO standard on Accessible Tourism



On 1 August 2016, UNWTO (the United Nations' World Tourist Organisation), together with the Spanish ONCE Fundacion for Cooperation and Social Inclusion of persons with disabilities put forward a formal proposal to ISO for the development of an international standard on Accessible tourism.

The proposal aims at tackling the whole value chain, from urban planning to the various services. A mapping and a standard setting phase should follow each other, by first exploring existing recommendations and requirements in the various fields and secondly to develop own recommendations and requirements in areas of the value chain, where international standardisation is still pending.

HOTREC position:

- *HOTREC, together with NET (Network of European Private Entrepreneurs in The tourism Sector), expressed its opinion on the proposal before its formal submission by saying that the development of an international accessible tourism standard risks not taking into account, or even contradicting much of the existing legislation and guidance which is in place to protect people with reduced mobility or disabilities. Furthermore, NET reiterated that the wide range of existing recommendations and regulations should be better promoted rather than developing new requirements that risk contradicting or do not take into account, the existing framework which supports and promotes accessible tourism.*
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TOURISM

2018 – Possible upcoming European Year of Cultural Heritage



On 30th August 2016, the Commission has put forward a proposal to the European Parliament and Council to designate 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage. In this way, the Commission is seeking to highlight the role of Europe's cultural heritage in fostering a shared sense of history and identity.

This will be the occasion to show the importance of European culture, and what the EU can do in terms of digitalisation, conservation, infrastructure, development of skills through EU funded programmes such as [Creative Europe](#). Events will be organised across Europe, as well as information, education and awareness-raising campaigns.

HOTREC position

- *HOTREC welcomes the Commission proposal and calls on the Commission to make sure that tourism activities play a strong role in the annual programme.*
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Respecting freedom of movement while preserving security



In order to continue protecting the safety of all citizens and travellers inside the EU space, while coping with fundamental rights and freedoms, the EU institutions are currently working on the following measures:

- Possibility of suspension of visa-free regimes granted to third countries, in the event of misuse by third country nationals (the proposal was adopted by interior ministers in May 2016 and by the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament in July 2016. Trilogues began). The measure could be required if irregular immigration, unfounded asylum applications or a failure to cooperate with the EU on "readmission" returns are noticed;
- Creation of the European Border and Coast Guard – the European Parliament and the Council agreed on 22 June 2016 on the Commission proposal that paves the way for a reinforced Agency (the old Frontex) to be launched, which will be able to support all Member States in preserving the EU external border and in intervening to address weaknesses in advance;
- A systematic external border control check of all European nationals and their identity documents on the basis of European police files, such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Interpol databases will be deployed. The objective is to increase security within the area, without internal border control. The text will now enter the trilogue phase.

HOTREC position

- *HOTREC fully supports the principle of free movement of people as one of the basic pillars of the EU;*
 - *HOTREC welcomes a strong external Schengen border. Therefore, welcomes the foundation of the new European Border and Coast Guard;*
 - *HOTREC also understands the need to introduce systematic checks on persons enjoying the right of free movement under Union Law, when they cross the external border for security reasons. HOTREC supports the idea of targeted checks provided that an assessment of the risks shows that this derogation will not harm the internal security of the Union;*
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PAYMENT SERVICES

MasterCard faces class-action law suits in the UK over its Interchange Fees practice



A 19 billion pound class-action lawsuit is about to be launch in the UK against MasterCard based on the European Commission ruling that MasterCard's Multilateral Interchange Fees (MIF) scheme was violating competition law. MasterCard's illegal MIF scheme resulted in significant additional cost for retailers which were passed-on consumers, therefore justifying a class-action lawsuit, according to the plaintiffs.

Next Steps:

The case will most likely be heard by the UK's competition Appeal Tribunal, which should organise a first hearing before the end of 2016. This could be followed by a full trial.

HEALTH

WHO: “Adolescent alcohol use has decreased”



According to a [report](#) published on March 2016 by the World Health Organisation, adolescent alcohol use has decreased in most European and North American countries and regions since the beginning of the 21st century. The findings indicate that the decrease is ongoing in all age groups and among boys as well as girls.

According with the report, the following points could have contributed to the trend of decrease in alcohol consumption:

- Policies developed in many countries and regions limit underage access and restrict use among those of all ages, including prevention policies;
- Changes in social norms, such as stronger societal disapproval of adolescent drinking;
- School based intervention targeting adolescents and their parents;
- Prevention programmes on life skills and healthy lifestyle may also be effective and can be considered as policy and practice options.

Actions:

- HOTREC members to continue implementing voluntary measures to decrease alcohol related harm at national level, especially focusing on enforcing age limits when selling and serving alcohol and developing education and information programmes on responsible drinking;
- HOTREC and HOTREC members to continue implementing Alcohol Forum commitments.

HOTREC position

- *HOTREC fully supports the re-establishment of Alcohol Forum based on the pillars defined by the Alcohol Strategy 2006-2012;*
 - *HOTREC regrets that NGOs left the Forum and hopes that they will come back to the platform – the EAHF should be diverse and represent the interests of all stakeholders related with alcohol policy;*
 - *HOTREC believes on the added value of the Alcohol Forum, as it is a platform to exchange best practices and where the ultimate goal is decreasing alcohol related harm;*
 - *HOTREC looks forward to the Commission announcement on what will be the next steps with regard to the alcohol policy.*
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SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Posting of Workers: revision does not breach subsidiarity principle



On 20 July 2016, the European Commission adopted a Communication (COM (2016) 505 final) re-examining its proposal of revision of the Posting of Workers Directive (COM (2016) 128 final). The Commission concluded that its proposal does not constitute a breach of the subsidiarity principle. The revision introduces changes in three main areas: remuneration of posted workers, rules on temporary agency workers, and long-term posting.

The aim of the proposal is to ensure that workers carrying out work at the same location are protected by the same mandatory rules, irrespective of whether they are local workers or posted workers. According to the Commission, the obligation for all Member States to apply the rules in all sectors of the economy cannot be established at national level but must be laid down at Union level. The proposal also respects the competence of Member States to set wages in accordance with national practices.

Next steps

The proposal will be analysed both in the European Parliament and at the Council.

STATISTICS

3,3% growth in nights spent in hotels and similar accommodation in 2015 and ICT use in tourism

Eurostat – Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments: Hotels and similar accommodation establishments registered an increase by 3,3% in terms of nights spent in the EU in 2015 compared to 2014. Also the first quarter of 2016 showed growth of 8,8% in terms of nights spent in hotels, bearing in mind that Easter was falling on March in 2016 while on April in 2015.

Eurostat – Tourism trips: Eurostat summarises the different aspects of the European tourist trips in this issue. E.g. 93,7% of all trips with overnight stays were made within the European Union. More than 1 out of 9 tourism trips was for professional purposes in Europe. Some parts, like regarding tourist expenditure will be updated in the coming weeks.

Eurostat – Use of ICT in tourism: Eurostat also published recently some figures on the ICT use in tourism. According to the figures, 40% of the internet users having bought or ordered goods and services online also ordered / booked accommodation services. 95% of all hotels had a website (not including micro enterprises), compared to 75% in the whole economy. 3 out of 4 accommodation establishments in Europe provide booking possibility on their own website.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

Next Meetings and General Assemblies

In the coming months, HOTREC will organise and/or participate to the following meetings:

- 27 September 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) – European Parliament Cocktail Reception - Towards a stronger tourism policy for European growth and jobs.
 - 30 September 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) - EU Working Group meeting on the revision of the Official Control Regulation – HOTREC will participate.
 - 30 September 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) - Sectoral Social Dialogue Steering Committee meeting. HOTREC and EFFAT will discuss the latest developments related with Social Dialogue.
 - 11 October 2016 (Bratislava, Slovakia) - European Tourism Forum. HOTREC will participate.
 - 19-21 October 2016 (Valletta, Malta) – HOTREC holds its 73rd General Assembly.
 - 29 November 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) – European Tourism day.
 - 29 November 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) – Launch of the EU platform on food losses and food waste. HOTREC, which was appointed member of the platform by the European Commission, will participate.
 - 30 November 2016 (Brussels, Belgium) – Joint HOTREC-UEAPME event on job creation and the tourism sector. The event is hosted by MEP Othmar Karas, Chair of the SME intergroup, and MEP Ujhelyi, Vice Chair of the European Parliament TRAN Committee
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