

Video-virtual meeting of the Barents Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT)

June,18, 2020 / 10:00

Dear colleagues, good afternoon!

Let me introduce myself: my name is Demyan, I'm the Head of International cooperation department of the Federal agency for Tourism of the Russian federation. It's my pleasure to join this meeting. The Barents Joint Working Group on Tourism is one of the key tourism dialog platforms, first of all, due to significant role of arctic tourism for us.

Unfortunately, Tourism sector has fast a big challenge named COVID-19. Russian tourism and hospitality industry, like in a lot of countries is also affected by the pandemic: according to preliminary estimates, our national sector suffers losses of at least 4 billion US dollars per quarter.

Obviously, at this stage, the threat of the spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19 on a global scale has not yet been overcome. In this regard, Russia has taken several emergency measures to support and recover industry. We have prepared and submitted proposals to the National Economic Recovery Plan for tourism, which are devoted to both priority measures to support the industry and further systematic development of tourism. We are talking about reducing the tax burden, investor support, improving human resources, digitalization and promotion, improving the safety of tourism and much more.

Besides, Russia implements some financial support programs, such as programs of preferential lending to SMEs and subsidies to regions to support SMEs.

In addition, the Russian government compensates to tourist operators the costs associated with non-refundable fares for air transportation, as well as the evacuation flights cost.

With the purpose to save jobs Russia has developed several businesses and workers support programmes, including loans to companies at 0% to pay salaries at a level not lower than the minimum wage. It's also planning to launch online training and up skills programmes for industry workers.

However, we are in a situation when the new travel rules are not officially approved in the context of the ongoing spread of coronavirus infection in the world. Based on the position of the Rospotrebnadzor, the Federal Agency for Tourism recommended tourists refrain from traveling outside the Russian Federation until the epidemiological situation would stabilize, and tour operators temporarily suspend the departure of Russians to foreign countries and provide maximum assistance in reserving travel dates to a later one.

We see that this process of recovery of the tourism sector is proceeding very carefully, and first of all, commences with the lifting of restrictions in terms of small trips within the countries.

Currently, like in most countries, all our efforts today are aimed at giving our citizens the opportunity to safely rest inside our country this summer. To do this, we have been working with Rospotrebnadzor on a daily basis to develop recommendations for all types of accommodation facilities: hotels, pensions, recreation centers, motels, etc.

In this regard, hotels are required to measure the temperature of employees and guests upon arrival, check their staff on COVID-19 and place guests only in single or family rooms.

The distance between guests at the check-in counters must be maintained, and guests will be served with food either from the menu or in the rooms. The distance between tables in restaurants must be at least 2 m. Daily cleaning of rooms is made at least once a day, including wet cleaning, airing the room and decontamination of the air with appropriate devices.

These recommendations, on the one hand, should ensure a safe holiday for our citizens, and on the other - not be excessive for the industry, so that businesses can restart their work.

However, unfortunately, we do not yet see the prerequisites for a rapid recovery of international tourism in the world, as the situation in many countries remains quite complex. In current situation, the launch of international tourism may be possible only in accordance with the epidemiological situation.

We understand that the restoration of the industry is possible only in close international cooperation, which will allow us to develop the right solutions and measures to overcome the current crisis.

Specifically, the dialogue between Russia and Barents Member States has the great importance. It is essential for us to elaborate a concrete framework of measures and action in order to objectively assess risks, to restore the inbound flow of tourists and promote safe tourist destinations.

After all, it is important to find a balance between the safety of people, which is an absolute priority, and so that people can have a comfortable and interesting holiday within the Barents Member States.

In the end of my speech I'd like to add a few words on visa regime facilitation. Our Mr. President Vladimir Putin suggested to expand the e-visa regime on the whole territory of Russian Federation from January 1, 2021 for a period of up to 16 days. This step assumes a quick and convenient format for obtaining a visa without

having to apply to visa centers. A tourist can apply for an e-visa online for free by leaving an application on the portal of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the future, it is planned to create a special mobile application for issuing electronic visas from phones and tablets.

A tourist will be able to enter by e-visa through most international airports in Russia, as well as by sea and by land at specially equipped checkpoints. All of them are marked on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are working with the Russian Border Service to expand the list of checkpoints on land and sea after the launch in January 2021.

We also hope that the list of countries for entry will be no less than for Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg – now it includes 53 countries. At the same time, the visa is likely to be paid. Its cost should not exceed 50 US dollars and can be issued 4 days before the trip. In future, if the period of stay with an e-visa is increased to 16 days, it is planned to cancel the regulation on the need to register foreign tourists, so an invitation from the host party will not be required.