

Speech for Bled - General Assembly of WATA - admittance to WATA 1995

I am very glad to meet you all here in Bled. I welcome the opportunity to express my thanks for you having accepted our candidature.

I am not going to give a presentation of our company since I have handed out our technical file. Nevertheless, I want to share with you a few impressions in this auspicious moment.

I wrote the application with the frustrating feeling of the step brother, as there are many in the Eastern countries, who is begging for himself and his world a kind embrace.

I greeted you with a gesture which can mean either Hello or Bye-Bye. As a Romanian philosopher said, you, the European people, have always favored a society where a decorous smile, politeness and a courtly greeting and handshake are the only measure for civilized society. But, at the same time, you do not assert that some 1500 years ago a European culture evolved that was to unfold, exploit, but still educate with its values the rest of mankind. Thus, everything happening now in the world and will take place in the universe tomorrow bears the imprint of Europe. We, the Europeans continue to be conquistadors, pirates, corsairs. But now we are corsairs of the spirit and this changes everything !

Still, you let the people live near one another as if they were one without another. And being supported by an intricate technique, which not only allowed you to get anywhere but rather, to get away from any place, you took over and advocated the society of "Bye Bye".

Since you don't say this, should we, the outsiders, the outcasts voice it?

The great European personalities have taught us that two unique centuries will prevail in the Annals of the World by the communion of their stray geniuses.

As you have welcomed us back today, like the wandering son who left to expiate the sin of its family, we thank you for having sacrificed the fat lamb and listen to what we have to say with the tolerance shown to the newcomer who still doesn't know to play by the rules.

I have told you all these things, things for learned and wise people, because I realized that tourism has come to be the most powerful mass media. From a very young age the child gets accustomed to holidays. Then, from desire, alluring brochures to the holiday itself we create the image, the illusion of happiness. We sell them their remembrances. We are endowed with most effective means of persuasion, which would have gratified even Apostle Thomas. This is the result of our being continuously in immediate contact with life and reality, but reality as we present it. Thus, we are simultaneously physicians, wizards and businessmen. In such hard times, when the world is shaking on its foundations under the ravaging struggle for power and greatness, in times of bloodshed, famine or illness, we are among

the few ones who can bring relief and comfort. This is why I think that we have to meditate upon this dimension of our craft, on the effects of our actions lest the rush after money, glory, power or organizational perfection should make us break that supposed oath of Hippocrates which we should have taken when we made our start in this trade. Now, at a time when this artificial environment was created by the multimedia we should bring in and protect the human dimension of this mass media means, tourism.

I too felt the need to know the scholars and the wise on my side! I have written hundreds of letters to the western part and got no answer while an entire system was falling apart around me dragging the former tourism along.

Thanks to your kindness, I am here now, face to face with you. I suggest, that together we should find the means to bring to this part of Europe where I come from the system which should give this new means of mass media to several million people, which are already accustomed with this modern drug - tourism - which used to create their pleasant remembrances and which is no longer accessible to them.

Although we are creators of images, we are nonetheless businessmen. So, to get to the point: - in that part of Europe where I stem from I witnessed the downfall of the former regime. We

have just started building the new structures. The invisible infrastructure of the tertiary sector, thus tourism, wasn't suitably developed even before: tour operating, insurances, ticketing, media and producing (merchandising) for tourism, etc. Now we are facing an impasse: the offer doesn't reach the client, the existing capital assets are of the collective type, deteriorating for the most part and the new created assets cannot reach a level of profitability. And the customers, especially those with small and medium incomes, even people with chronic illnesses can no longer benefit from the former capital assets. Simultaneously new forms of tourism arise: business travels for small employees of private enterprises or individual businessmen trying to find new merchandise and clients, immigration, the new rich, visits of businessmen and politicians from developed countries etc. The characteristic infrastructure of the tertiary sector: communication, databases, means of communication, does practically not exist. We ourselves, as a company, had to overcome great difficulties and have just learned the ABC. I thank all those who supported us and have shown understanding. Many tourism agencies have been set up in this area. But most of them have peripheral activities.

They have no financial power, nor do they know how to reach you. The very action and denomination of the period we are passing through in our countries are inaccurate in my opinion. We are talking about "transition" instead of focusing on integration. In a global world one has to live globally. But integration is impossible without learning the rules of international tourism, without learning and respecting the code of conduct.

The WATA brochure brings forth the question: What is the WATA philosophy?

The answer that is given is: "WATA's basic idea is to bring local travel agency into a network.

As a consequence, a substantial volume of business to the agency's turnover can be expected....WATA's statutes guarantee that every individual member of WATA is in a position to compete successfully with even the largest corporation." Give a chance to these countries, make an additional effort and show them who you are, be more trenchant. Thus you'll get more interlocutors in this areas, more information about them and they will learn how to work properly and the local touristic flow in these countries will increase and maybe immigration hemmed. Invest your know how and they will give the rest. Together we will succeed. Otherwise new walls will rise between us.

- in the fall of 1993 I launched the idea of what I called "Asylrecht-schutzversicherung" a kind of repatriation insurance in case of

illegal immigration. It didn't reach the right desk and the idea remained only paperwork.

Nevertheless, this year I saw that the problem has come to an inverted solution. Some Consulates require a contract, warranted by the company in the destination country. But this is a false solution, a simple shift of responsibility towards you. We must find a solution in order that real tourism and immigration be treated distinctly. It will be difficult at the start, but both parties are involved and you have the experience of the '50 ties and '60 ties which many European countries have undergone.

Otherwise, you will stick to the traditional business, we will have to be content with what we can do, our worlds will separate again and the negative effects of immigration will have a damaging impact on both sides.

Every new window opened towards this part of Europe will lead to an improvement of the local services. Slowly but steadily the private sector will develop. The more substantial its contribution to the State budget through taxes, the more effective it will be able to assert its interest in order to make its way into the international structures, in the global world of our time.

Resuming the three presented issues:

- the new dimension of tourism as a means of mass media with a strong capacity of persuasion, penetration and audience.

- the necessity to support the integration of the new, private tourism agencies of the former Eastern Europe into the structures of international tourism

- the cooperation in the efficient mutual regulations for the outgoing activities in all these countries in order to separate the touristic flow from illegal immigration

The accomplishment of the goals I mentioned can lead to a new success of WATA: the integration of the new countries, their acceptance in the family of world tourism and not the building of new walls and barriers between us.

Thank you for your attention and, again, for giving me the chance to be here. I am looking forward to welcome you in Sibiu, my native town and close with the usual greeting in our parts: the Latin "SERVUS

Ilie ROTARIU
INTERTOURISM