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Speech for the TOURAGE project's final conference "Developing Senior Tourism in Remote Regions – Experiences and the Way Forward"

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

Today I have the honor to welcome you at the final conference of TOURAge project devoted to development of senior tourism in remote regions! I would like to stress, that TOURAge project was selected among the 20 best European tourism projects enhancing sustainable tourism development. Altogether around 200 European Union projects from different funding programmes were evaluated.

Several years ago we have learned, that the economic and financial crisis can also be an opportunity. After getting acquainted with the results of the TOURAGE project, I was positively surprised to discover, that demographic changes can also be regarded as possibility and not as an unsolvable burden! Senior tourism can be regarded not only as recreational activities for seniors living in welfare, but also as an opportunity for local seniors with average or below-average income. They can provide guiding services for tourists interested to listen to unique local stories, as well as to attend interesting local places not included in touristic guides!

Thus by activating seniors and involving them in local life of our municipalities, this would be mutually beneficial process for both sides: seniors and municipalities. On the one hand, senior tourism can give its input into regional economy, which is of special importance in remote regions often struggling with the consequences of demographic changes putting burden on the social budgets of municipalities. European Union Member States are already experiencing transition towards a much older population structure, as birth rates are getting lower, but life expectancy increases. As a result, the proportion of people of working age is diminishing, leading in turn to an increased burden on those of working age. Consequently, municipalities are facing the challenge to find new ways

of organizing services and foster regional competitiveness, and senior tourism might be one of the solutions.

On the other hand, by such kind of activities we can foster active and healthy ageing! Seniors involved actively in the local life can bring to local life new ideas on interesting activities, as well as they just feel, that their activities are necessary for community and visitors. This is not a secret, that sometimes loneliness can also cause significant health problems. The challenge might be to provide affordable tourist products for seniors with average or below-average income, that's why it would be very important to involve the representatives of seniors already in generation of ideas on tourism activities, involving in this process great range of stakeholders from public and private sector – national and regional tourism organizations, ministries, regional and local authorities and NGOs.

We have to take into mind, that seniors are not a uniform, but diverse group of individuals having different levels of income, different state of health and different interests and needs. This all have to be taken into account when searching for the best tourism products and services, best involvement of local seniors in the provision of touristic services, as well as best approaches, how to coordinate the common work of all the stakeholders at national and local level.

Last, but not least, I wanted to remind, that on 1st of October we will celebrate the International Day of Older Persons already for the 24th time. The theme for this year is “Leaving No One Behind: Promoting a Society for All”. I hope, that the good practices you will hear about today will inspire you for new ideas in your local and regional municipalities and institutions in order to help in building our society for all!

I would like to thank all the project partners for the activities implemented and special thanks to Vidzeme planning region from Latvia! Thank you for your attention and wish you very informative day! Let it be active and healthy ageing for all of us!