

EHTTA President's Speech to the EHTTA- General Assembly

São Pedro do Sul, 13 th May 2021

Welcome to the Termas, São Pedro do Sul for our first physical General Assembly since October 2019! Dear thermal friends, dear Members of EHTTA, I am so happy to see several of you here, to see you in person, and to see so many others on the Zoom call. You will be able to travel again soon, and when you can travel, we will meet again!

In particular, I would like to welcome to our General Assembly Mr Christian Corne, our first President and now an Honorary President of this Association, and my predecessor and Honorary President, Mr Guiseppe Bellandi. Dear Presidents, dear friends, without your hard work, vision and dedication we would not have this Association today, and I am glad to see you online.

Our hosts for this event have been wonderful, the Press Conference and Café of Europe yesterday have been successful. We are very pleased to be here in São Pedro do Sul, in this beautiful thermal town, which as you saw yesterday has such a fine Roman baths, and to learn about the thermal waters and heritage, and we are grateful that you invited us to be here today. On behalf of the whole Association I would like to thank .

- Victor Leal, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, of the Termas São Pedro do Sul.
- Vitor Figueiredo
- Pedro Mouro, the Vice President of the Municipality of São Pedro do Sul

And of course, Fátima Saraiva and Fátima Carvalho, the two wonderful ladies who have organised this fantastic event with Simone and Catherine.

As we saw at the Café of Europe yesterday, people have been travelling to thermal towns for thousands of years, and our towns were some of the most important places on the first maps to be made. Despite the fact that we have been prevented from travelling, I believe that thermal towns were important two thousand years ago, and they are important and relevant NOW, as we emerge slowly from the pandemic.

We launched our “Rediscover” campaign yesterday, not only to remind visitors that we exist but to remind leaders throughout Europe of the importance of our thermal towns. In several countries in our network, thermal establishments were some of the first places to close and after months and months of lockdown, in many places they are not permitted to open, despite the benefits that reopening would bring. You will hear more later about our intention to keep reminding national and European leaders about the importance of thermalism for the recovery of Europe.

Our towns have been important to the health and shared memory and heritage of Europe for far too long to simply be forgotten! We want to see more development of thermalism projects such as the ones in my home town of Ourense. We want to see more visitors coming to our towns and enjoying every aspect of what we have to offer. And we want our sector to recover through helping more people to recover from COVID and the effects of lockdown.

We are standing on the threshold of a new era of development of thermalism projects, and we welcome the economic benefits that they will bring to our towns. We also welcome the impact that the Great Spas of Europe will have on our sector in general, especially if, as we all hope, they become a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July. We must and we will be prepared for this news and the ripple effects we hope it will have on all our members, including those that are in the Great Spas of Europe – and these include founding members such as Bath, Spa and Vichy and newer members that we welcome, such as Bad Ems and Bad Kissingen.

This year we have been pleased to support the careful opening up of the tourism industry across Europe. For this reason we have been very pleased to work with the European Tourism Manifesto Alliance and the European Tourism Commission and others who are working so hard to allow people to come back to our towns and to reconnect to the waters and everything else we have to offer. We also support the development of Green Certificates, which will allow people to move freely within the EU and to rediscover our towns more easily. We were disappointed not to have been able to enter the ETC's recent funding call, but we are looking forward to the next one, which should be a longer-term, more viable proposition for us.

We continue to develop partnerships across Europe, and none is more important than being a member of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme, and we are proud to have been certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe since 2010. We will be under scrutiny this summer as we take part in the reevaluation of our Cultural Route. This is an important time for us and requires the support of every single member, as we gather evidence for the evaluation.

I cannot stress enough how important your participation is in this and in everything that we do. As an Association, we have survived this last terrible year. We have found ways to work together and in some ways we have seen benefits from this – we are in contact more regularly than before, and meeting online has saved us a lot of money! It's not the same as meeting together – we know that, but I am glad that we have survived and have come out stronger than ever and are ready to share our phenomenal story and fabulous towns with the world once again.

I would like to call on each and every member of our Association to really commit to the future of EHTTA and to commit to its aims and objectives as never before. We need to take our message to the next level and to be heard. And if we join our voices together and work together for our shared objectives, we will succeed! And now I would like to open the first General Assembly of 2021!