

Dear Mrs. Marek, State Secretary Ministry of Economy, Youth and Family

Dear Mrs. Müller, President of the European Network for Accessible Tourism

Dear Mr. Vella

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Vienna, welcome to the 2nd International ENAT Congress 2009 in Vienna at the Austria Center.

Accessible Tourism is the key word and your congress will deal with case studies, examples of good practices but also discuss where additional efforts are necessary to achieve accessibility for tourists.

But these initiatives should not only focus on tourism but also on the meetings industry, some people might say that meetings are part of tourism, this is true when it comes to hotel accommodation and travel, but accessibility is also necessary within the meeting and the internal meeting logistics. Conference Centers and other meeting venues such as universities etc. are not seen as being part of tourism. But they are also key in my business which is the meetings industry. It needs a lot of forwardthinking and cooperation with the respective people to analyse those types of venues.

Why?

Meetings only achieve the best possible output for the individual delegate if the delegates convenience can be maximized. Any hurdle hindering the individual output for a delegate puts the overall quality of a meeting in danger. The meetings industry, suppliers and meeting organizers need to have a look beyond possible legal standards to make this individual convenience happen.

Allow me to bring another aspect into the debate. It is valid and fair to discuss how accessible tourism can be improved. However, we are only looking to make the life for the traveller easier. But we also have to face the following issue – we are talking about tourists using designed products, but we are rarely speaking about visitors. In my opinion, as a travelling person, we should become visitors, breaking down barriers vis a vis the country, the region, the people we are visiting. Breaking down the walls which hinder us to see and to adapt to local customs, local societies is another aspect I want to raise. Touristic enclaves, closed resorts create barriers which we have to try to break down – barrier free travelling means not only that my personal wish to move around without limitations should be feasible but as a visitor I have to break down my own barrier when travelling to another destination. We should keep that in mind.

I want to wish you all a successful conference and enjoy your stay in Vienna.

Thank you