

DECLARATION ISSUED BY THE ATTENDEES OF THE EUROPEAN SPA AND BALNEOLOGY CONGRESS

Karlovy Vary Spa Industry Declaration

Representatives of international organisations overarching the medical spa industry, health resorts in Europe, representatives of universities and institutions specialising in balneology research, representatives of spa towns and municipalities and other institutions involved in the medical spa industry met in Karlovy Vary as part of the European Spa and Balneology Congress to discuss the challenges faced by health tourism including the spa industry in today's turbulent times.

In conclusion, they decided to formulate a joint declaration to make an appeal to the elected representatives of the European institutions and to the candidates for the EU Parliament elections to support the medical spa industry and European health destinations, not to underestimate the industry's therapeutic significance and other benefits, and those who save much money for public health, and not to neglect this in the strategic plans and meetings of stakeholders, and concepts being developed at the level of European institutions. In line with the subtitle of the congress:

"European Spas, a Path to a Healthy Life", the attendees state the following:

European medical spa industry - world cultural heritage and tourism phenomenon

I. The European territory abounds in a wealth of natural medicinal resources, the effects of which started to be used centuries ago to treat and prevent illness. It was often the strong personality of a reformer, a healer, who promoted new treatment methods using natural resources. The varied history of spas and the spa industry is thus not only part of the history of medicine. Still, it is also associated with developing culture, natural sciences, and technology.

The systematic development and promotion of spa towns has resulted in 11 leading European spa towns being added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2021. In addition to the exceptional architecture of the spa towns, this recognition is mainly due to the phenomenon of spa stays, including treatments and balneological procedures that improve the health of spa guests. Their addition to the World Heritage List confirms the spas' uniqueness, representing a massive potential for tourism, rural development and a great commitment. The signatories to the Declaration, therefore, wish to highlight this exceptional heritage, which must be protected and preserved for future generations.

European medical spa industry - a vital component of the health care of European citizens

II. Balneology, a scientific discipline focusing on spa treatment, is one of the oldest therapeutic methods for human civilisation. Balneotherapy is a curative and preventive medical discipline. Traditional medical spas offer a return to nature and its rich resources instead of chemical treatments. Spa treatment has a proven beneficial effect in the treatment of many diseases. Moreover, the positive effects persist for several months after the treatment ends. Prevention plays an essential role in the spa industry, and our members welcome a growing number of self-payers. That is one of the reasons why people return to the spa regularly. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of prevention and boosting the immune system.

The congress attendees would, therefore, like to draw the attention of European policymakers to the enormous healing potential of medical spas. Europe's health resorts should get a more visible integration of EU policy in EU4H and regional sustainable development strategy. Let us start by using these services to treat all the post-COVID consequences that affect more than 1% of the European population.

European medical spas - a place to take care of our ageing population.

III. Today, Europeans live longer and healthier lives than most people worldwide. However, Europe's population is ageing, and a radical change in demographic trends can be expected in the next two decades with around 30 per cent of the European population over 65 years of age. This will increase the need for more efficient healthcare and social systems. We must look for potential solutions, such as health resorts with the medical competence to improve the health and social care of Europe's ageing population - also in rural regions!

Efforts to maintain or improve the health of body and mind/longevity programmes currently present a vast potential for innovation. Spa towns are where services can be offered to ill clients and those who want to work on their health.

The Karlovy Vary Spa and Balneology Congress attendees believe that medical spas will continue and will play an even more critical role in the care of the ageing population in the years to come. Spa experts are encouraging policymakers to recognise this strength of the spa industry and to help put it to use as best they can.

European medical spas - a time-honoured sustainable development concept for Europe's economically weak regions

IV. As a specific tourism sector, the spa industry plays a significant economic role in its respective regions. Most importantly, it is a major employer. As a labour-intensive industry, it offers employment directly or in related sectors to almost a million people in around 1,400 spa locations across Europe, where spa guests spend nearly 200 million nights. In addition to the cultural and social significance of spas, we must not forget environmental protection. It is one of the essential factors and one of the main attractions of health resorts. In spa towns and climate health resorts (mountain, seaside), there are strict environmental regulatory restrictions in place concerning the management and maintenance of medicinal springs, waste management, noise restrictions, traffic restrictions, energy management and, finally, urban greenery care and maintenance. Attention is also being paid to improving the environmental management of spa complexes and businesses and the management and coordination of spa locations and the regions in which they are located. Negative environmental impacts are continuously monitored and analysed, leading to increased investment in modern technologies to monitor the environmental state of a given location. The signatories to the declaration are convinced that this is where spa locations can serve as an example for other regions. Environmental protection is a global issue in which the role of spas should certainly not be neglected.

The declaration aims to draw European policymakers' attention to the enormous potential that medical spas and climate health resorts offer. Please support them and use them not only as part of public healthcare programmes. Their cultural and historical heritage also deserves protection, including taking care of the areas rich in natural medicinal resources used for spa treatment and making them unique.

We must all work to ensure this unique natural wealth remains preserved for future generations and integrated into the health care system.

We appreciate your support!

4.– 6. October 2023, Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic

The undersigned statutory representatives of the listed institutions:



