

**Speech 1 – Welcome Address** (16 October at 09:15)

Your Excellency,

Dear President of the Cyprus Hotel Association,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Good morning, and welcome to Paphos – to HOTREC’s 91st General Assembly.

It is a true honour to open this meeting in the presence of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Nikos Christodoulides, which reflects the catalytic role of the hospitality sector for Cyprus – and Europe’s future.

A sector which represents 2 million businesses across Europe – hotels, restaurants, cafés and bars where the European hospitality spirit comes to life every day, connecting cultures, safeguarding the European way of life, supporting local communities and creating prosperity for all.

Your Excellency – it is a great privilege to have you among us today.

Cyprus is set to assume the EU Council Presidency in January 2026 – a pivotal responsibility at a critical and challenging period for our Union. We are confident that the Cypriot Presidency could – among other priorities – help shape Europe’s competitiveness agenda, champion the needs of SMEs across the continent and play a significant role in further recognising the significance of the hospitality sector at the EU level.

First, I would like to express our warmest thanks to our hosts, the Cyprus Hotel Association, and especially to its President Thanos Michaelides and Director General Christos Angelides. Their outstanding hospitality and meticulous organisation make us all feel at home.

Cyprus is not only a magnificent island. It is a great example of the transformative power of hospitality, which turns natural beauty, history and people's warmth into a driver for growth and employment.

As a Greek, standing here in Cyprus, I feel extremely proud. As our two countries are not only bound by our common language, culture and national anthem, but also by our unique understanding of what hospitality really is – *filoxenia* – the love of welcoming others and making friends out of complete strangers.

It is this spirit that unites us all across Europe and gives meaning to our work. Today's opening is a moment to celebrate unity. Let us use these next days in Paphos to learn from one another, exchange ideas openly, and reaffirm our common ambition: to build a sustainable, competitive and inclusive future for European hospitality to the benefit of all Europeans.

Thank you for your presence, your trust, and your commitment to HOTREC, the powerful voice of the European hospitality sector.

And now, it is my pleasure to invite our host, Mr Thanos Michaelides, President of the Cyprus Hotel Association, to take the floor.