

Dear Presidents, dear Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honour and privilege that I stand before you today as the President of HOTREC, on this special day for Italian Restaurants.

Today not only celebrates Italy's excellent culinary heritage, but also pays tribute to the invaluable contributions of the restaurant industry to our European culture, economy, and society.

Italy, with its world-renowned gastronomic tradition, holds a special place in people's hearts and souls. From the sumptuous pastas of Emilia-Romagna to the exquisite wines of Tuscany, from the aromatic coffees of Naples to the delectable gelatos of Sicily, Italian cuisine is a symphony of taste, a testament to the artistry and passion of its people.

However, behind the famous dishes and welcoming ambiance of our restaurants lies a dynamic industry that faces its own set of challenges. The past year has been particularly difficult, as the hospitality sector has navigated through unprecedented times due to the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Yet, despite these adversities, the resilience and determination of restaurant owners, chefs, and staff have shone through, inspiring us all with their unwavering commitment to their craft.

In just a few weeks' time, we as Europeans will be electing our new leadership. It is crucial for us to emphasize HOTREC's priorities in shaping new laws that support the growth and sustainability of the restaurant industry. Let me share with you some of them.

First, we advocate for tourism to be recognised as an economic and social hub that creates millions of jobs.

Here are the numbers. Tourism accounts for 10% of the EU's GDP. Over 50% of establishments in European hospitality are food-led businesses, with almost 1 million restaurants, pubs and cafés all over Europe. The majority are micro-enterprises employing under 10 people, and over 300.000 of them have just one employee.

Second, we push **for fair taxation policies**. In many countries the rise of VAT rates affects affordability, competitiveness, and the overall economic vitality of businesses, in particular small and independent restaurants.

GIORNATA DELLA RISTORAZIONE ITALIANA

Un'iniziativa ideata da FIPE per valorizzare e rafforzare i valori ed il ruolo della ristorazione e della gastronomia italiana, celebrando un tema fondamentale: l'Ospitalità.

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Third, we work together to help companies in their commitment to embrace a more **sustainable** approach. This is imperative but also represents opportunities for businesses to adapt. We must engage with European and national policymakers in shaping a regulatory landscape that tackles the climate emergency while safeguarding the viability of our businesses, prioritizing adaptation efforts and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Waste management is a good example where we can successfully work together with FIPE by sharing best practices, innovative solutions and raising awareness to reduce waste.

Last but not least, **innovation and digitalization** will be part of this successful transition. The most important thing is that market competition remains fair and balanced. This is not without challenges. The current situation is ironic: hotels and restaurants have to pay for all the operating and investment costs, while large online booking platforms control the visibility. In principle, these platforms must comply with EU rules on the digital market. Yet in practice, due to market dominance, the visibility of their direct booking options overshadows hotels and restaurants. The detrimental effect of fake online reviews on the reputation and revenues of restaurants is another example showing the need to join forces to reach digital fairness.

Our collective voice is represented by HOTREC and its members, urging policymakers to recognize the vital role that restaurants play in driving economic growth and creating jobs. By championing these priorities, we can pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for restaurants throughout Europe.

As we celebrate this National Restaurant Day, we recognize the integral role that restaurants play in our cultural heritage and economic prosperity. Let us continue to defend our local eateries and make sure they not only survive but thrive in the face of adversity.

To end, I extend my deepest gratitude to all those who work tirelessly to make Italy's restaurants the vibrant and cherished institutions they are. Together, let us praise the spirit of hospitality, the joys of dining, and the enduring legacy of Italian cuisine.

Thank you.

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