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PRESS RELEASE –for immediate release

Lech Walesa Greet Attendees of the CEETRA Travel Retail Forum

Thursday, 7th November 2024 (Gdansk). Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and former President of Poland, **Lech Walesa**, addressed the **CEETRA Travel Retail Forum** held yesterday in Gdansk. During his speech, he remarked, “Up until this last election, I had a lot of respect for the American Nation” and encouraged everyone to engage in politics, because “it’s all your responsibility”.

The forum’s agenda had a strong regional focus, covering topics such as managing international teams – Poland’s workforce now includes over **1 million Ukrainians** – the challenges faced by a local brand that has recently entered the duty-free market, and the latest trends in consumer behavior in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

Andrzej Milaszewicz, Chairman of Lagardère Travel Retail Poland, welcomed attendees to the **European Solidarity Centre**, located in the historic shipyard where the Solidarność movement laid the foundation for the end of the communist era.

Peter Mohn of m1nd-set provided an update on passenger traffic, highlighting that numerous airports are already more than **12%** ahead of pre-COVID numbers. Following Western trends, the in-store experience is now more important than the price advantage in duty-free shopping. Data collected within the region also revealed that the average spend in CEE is **\$99** if the customer interacted with a staff member, compared to **\$64** if they did not.

A study on **Generation Z shoppers** by m1nd-set surprised many, as this increasingly important segment is less easy to influence and tends to have very clear expectations towards brands and shopping experiences. Novelties must be designed to appeal to Gen Z, especially their desire to belong, express opinions, and support organizations that are ethical, green, and inclusive, said **Anna Marchesini**, Head of Business Development at m1nd-set. While a significant number of customers make impulse purchase decisions in-store, 50% also do research beforehand on social media.

Franck Tourtois, Partner at ACM Poland, presented the results of a bespoke study conducted for CEETRA on how companies in Poland managed the increasing share of Ukrainian employees. High turnover rates and difficulties in communicating and establishing common values have raised concerns in many travel retail companies in the region. Tourtois recommended fostering open communication, having an active integration strategy, training managers, and being proactive in supporting a diverse workforce, considering that not all workers understand the same language.

Michał Paszota, owner of Podole Wielkie Distillery, summarized his experience with **entering the duty-free channel** in three locations only weeks before the event. He stressed that the lack of people and experience for regional suppliers should be recognized, and the channel would benefit if there was clearer guidance on best practices, criteria for growth, and general expectations towards the brand.

How to increase revenue in the existing space? As airport retail operates in inflexible critical infrastructure, operators should decouple processes wherever possible and scale up using modular solutions instead, said **Martijn Steur** of Kinetic Consultancy. He left the audience with plenty of best practices on how digitalization can achieve this. He also advocated for centralized receiving and distribution centers, as this reduces bottlenecks in restocking, keeps staff on the shop floor, and allows activities such as prep-kitchens to be moved outside the secure areas, eliminating the need for airport badges and freeing up premium space.

Julie Lassaigne, General Secretary of ETRC, updated attendees on the impact of the **EU elections** on key personnel and policies. Listing each Commissioner-delegate from the CEE region with their priorities and open questions, she set the stage for an alignment between CEETRA engagement activities in each of the countries and ETRC activities in Brussels. Circling back to the US election results, she reminded everyone that Andrzej Duda, President of Poland, has made the strengthening of US-EU cooperation a top priority for the Polish presidency of the EU, starting on January 1st.

The following pictures are available on request:



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Notes for editors:

CEETRA – Central and Eastern European Travel Retail Association aisbl.

- A regional industry association organising companies involved in the duty-free and travel retail industry in the Central and Eastern European region.
- Representing companies in Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine involved in supplying and retailing goods to travelling consumers in all duty free and travel retail outlets throughout the Central and Eastern European region.
- The association's aim is to protect, promote, and facilitate the Region's travel retail channel by providing the means to obtain the most favourable trading environment for the travel related commerce.
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