

Andrzej Miłaszewicz elected Chair of CEETRA



Andrzej Miłaszewicz, CEO of Lagardère Duty Free Polska, is the new Chairman of CEETRA

Andrzej Miłaszewicz, CEO of Lagardère Duty Free Polska, has been elected as the new Chairman of the Central and Eastern European Travel Retail Association (CEETRA) at the group's annual meeting at Lagardère's Warsaw offices last month.

Miłaszewicz's election marks a return to a leading CEETRA role for the veteran retail executive, whose near 30-year retailing career began with Carrefour in the domestic market, followed by his move into travel retail with his arrival at Lagardère in 2009, before he went on to become one of the founders of CEETRA exactly a decade ago.

Commenting on his election, Miłaszewicz said: "Unusually for a very specialist regional and trade sector group, the war in Ukraine means CEETRA has found itself at the very forefront of global news. Across the CEETRA region it placed members at borders, airports and train stations on the front line of the refugee crisis. This has been so much more than an economic or business event – it is a very tragic human story in which our members and our staff have been directly engaged with arriving refugees. Furthermore, many Ukrainian colleagues working in CEETRA enterprises – mainly women – have had to leave behind homes and loved ones. The material and psychological impact across CEETRA members has obviously been very substantial."

Measures taken by CEETRA members as the crisis escalated included:

Restaurants and airports offered free food, drinks and washing facilities;

Offices and technical buildings have been converted to accommodation;

Logistical assistance is being provided for refugee application, onward travel, and the sending and receiving of welfare packages.

Turning to the direct economic impact, Miłaszewicz said that in Warsaw alone 50 weekly flights were lost to Ukraine, and a further 20 to Russia – itself a direct 8% decline.

Elsewhere in the CEETRA region, Miłaszewicz said: “Clearly for border stores much of the trade has abruptly stopped, while the loss of Russian tourism has been felt strongly in Prague, Budapest and other centers, where this was significant.”

Drive to recruit local brands to CEETRA

Ironically, as the pandemic recedes, Miłaszewicz reflected: “Paradoxically CEETRA has organized the biggest number of its Travel Retail Forums over the past two years, including four in 2021 alone. This reflected that CEETRA members, of necessity, temporarily put advocacy to one side, including our lobbying for arrivals duty stores, which is one of CEETRA’s core aspirations. Instead, we have pushed CEETRA forward as a means of urgent, and very successful, business exchange.”

Miłaszewicz urged more local brands to become members: “Many, many more companies – especially the excellent array of local brands from the CEETRA region – should become members.”

He gave a specific example born of the current circumstances: “99% of the travel retail trade has stopped selling Russian alcohol which has produced a gap which producers, such as Poland’s Chopin Vodka, would do well to spearhead through our channel. These indigenous brands should aim to get the very same advantages long enjoyed by the biggest global brands who have always used travel retail for market positioning.”

To support these desires, Miłaszewicz wants CEETRA to take its meetings to other destinations in the future. “After the years of lockdown we immediately need to focus our current meeting schedules on our member countries, in the EU and Balkan states, but later we obviously want to take in other states such as Georgia, Moldova – and I hope, in good time, Ukraine, where travel retail will make an important financial contribution to the reconstruction of shattered airport infrastructure.”

The CEETRA Board now comprises:

Chairman: Andrzej Milaszewicz, CEO, Lagardère Duty Free Polska;

Treasurer: Nebojsa Cirjakovic, External Affairs Manager Global Travel Retail, British American Tobacco;

Benjamin Dillmann, Corporate Affairs Manager, Gebr Heinemann;

New Board Member: Gyte Landreau, Global Customer Manager, Pernod Ricard;

New Board Member: Eszter Horváth, Senior Concessions Manager, Budapest Airport.

Patrick Bohl, who served as CEETRA Chairman from 2019 to 2022, has stepped down and will continue to support CEETRA in the role of Senior Advisor.

The Board thanked Bohl for his contribution, especially in developing CEETRA into a financially stable and more active organization, and creating the Travel Retail Forum, which last year took place four times, becoming the most important platform for the region.

The Board also thanked Sylvie Ngoma, Pernod Ricard Travel Retail, who has been serving as Treasurer for many years and has announced her retirement from the Board, for her contribution to the association.