

Tourism policy: towards a stronger partnership for Europe, Lisbon strategy

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PURPOSE: the presentation of a Commission document on a renewed EU Tourism Policy.

CONTENT: on February 2005, the Commission proposed a new start for the Lisbon Strategy focusing the European Union's efforts on two principal tasks ? delivering stronger, lasting growth and more and better jobs.

To recall, European tourism creates more than 4% of the Community's GDP, with about 2 million enterprises employing about 4% of the total labour force. When the links to other sectors are taken into account, tourism contributes around 11% to GDP, employing more than 12% of the labour force ? equivalent to 24 million jobs. The challenges European tourism is faced with require a cohesive policy response at EU level. This policy must be focused on clear and realistic goals, commonly shared by decision-makers, employers and employees, as well as by local populations. It should make the best use of available resources and take advantage of all possible synergies. It must build on the whole range of actions already carried out and must clearly offer added value to the national and regional policies and measures. Therefore any European tourism policy should be complementary to policies carried out in Member States.

Towards a renewed European tourism policy: the main aim of this policy will be to improve the competitiveness of the European tourism industry and create more and better jobs through the sustainable growth of tourism in Europe and globally.

In this context, the Commission considers that the most appropriate instruments for the implementation of this policy are co-ordination within the Commission and within national authorities, co-operation between the different stakeholders, and the establishment of specific supporting actions.

The main areas on which the policy will focus are:

1) Mainstreaming measures affecting tourism: given the large number of policies affecting tourism, it is necessary to actively promote better regulation, both at national and European level. The Commission proposes to improve and extend the use of impact assessment (IA) for new proposals. This integrated approach ensures that tourism will be fully taken into account in all IA work for proposals likely to affect the sector. It also proposes screening pending legislative proposals and simplifying existing European legislation. This will include legislation such as the Package Travel Directive and the Timeshare Directive; the latter is regarded as a priority. The Commission will continue to consult regularly with stakeholders on how the simplification programme should be further developed over the coming years. Each year, the initiatives that may affect tourism, included in the Commission Work Programme, will be identified in order to make sure that their impact on the sector's competitiveness will be taken into account at an early stage.

Tourism has benefited greatly from the financial support offered by the various European financial instruments. In the period 2007-2013, the Structural Funds and other EU Programmes, will financially support the development of tourism businesses, services and infrastructure. The ERDF shall support more sustainable patterns of tourism. Environment and transport infrastructures, both of utmost importance for tourism, are also financed by the Cohesion Fund. Tourism development, given its employment creation potential, is an important domain of the European Social Fund's (ESF) intervention. The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) also supports schemes for retraining in occupations, besides sea fishing, which may relate to tourism. Research which will be supported under the proposed 7th EC Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration activities may result in benefits for the tourism sector as for example, research on information and communication technologies, satellite applications, cultural heritage and land use.

2) Promoting tourism sustainability: the elaboration and implementation of a European Agenda 21 for tourism is a long-term process. Further to this work the Commission plans specific actions promoting the economic and social sustainability of the European tourism such as:

- to identify national and international measures to support tourism-related SMEs and set up a good practice exchange process;
- to evaluate the economic impact of better accessibility in the tourism sector on macroeconomic growth and employment, business opportunities for SMEs, the quality of services and competitiveness;
- facilitating the exchange of ?tourism for all? good practice;
- publishing a handbook on ?How to set up Learning Areas in the Tourism sector? in order to support the upgrading of skills in the tourism sector with the involvement of all Stakeholders;
- studying employment trends in coastal and sea-related tourism sectors;
- developing official statistics and commissioning e-Business Watch studies to assess future implications and impact of e-business on the tourism industry;
- continuation of its initiatives and collaboration with the Member States, the industry and the World Tourism Organisation in order to combat the sexual exploitation of children, especially when such crimes are committed by tourists.

Improving the understanding of European tourism: decision-makers at public and private level need harmonised, more detailed statistics, made available in a timely manner. The Council Directive 95/57/EC on the collection of statistical information in the field of tourism will be updated in order to take the evolution of tourism in Europe and the needs of its users into account. It will be substantially improved in matters such as timeliness and punctuality, relevance, and comparability.

Supporting the promotion of European destinations: to contribute to the marketing of Europe as a set of attractive tourist destinations, the Commission financed the creation of the European Tourist Destinations Portal. It will include practical information about Europe, such as travel planning (transportation, weather and calendar) or recommendations on ?where to go? and ?what to do? and links towards national web sites. The operational phase will start on March 2006 and the Portal will be managed by the European Travel Commission.

Improving the visibility of tourism: the Commission, in partnership with the national public administrations and industry stakeholders, will continue enhancing the visibility and understanding of European tourism since often, due to its complexity, it is viewed only in its narrow definition rather than as a phenomenon which affects many parts of the economic and social fabric.

To conclude, in this report, the Commission presents what and how it intends to do in the area of tourism within the current EU legal framework in order to better exploit the growth and job potential of the sector in a sustainable way. It also highlights the way the various stakeholders can be involved in the Community actions. The renewed policy addresses all principal aspects of European policy making and allows the constructive collaboration of everyone concerned. Its degree of success depends of the response and active involvement of all stakeholders.