



European Economic and Social Committee

INT/231
**Tourism policy and public-
private cooperation**

Brussels, 15 September 2004

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on

Tourism policy and public-private cooperation

(own-initiative opinion)

On 29 January 2004, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under the second paragraph of Rule 29 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

Tourism policy and public-private cooperation
(own-initiative opinion).

The Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 14 July 2004. The rapporteur was **Mr Mendoza**.

At its 411th plenary session (meeting of 15 September 2004), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 148 votes to one with three abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1 In line with its commitment to the tourism sector in Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion on *Socially sustainable tourism for everyone* at its plenary session on 29 October 2003.

1.1.1 That opinion was subsequently presented at the European Tourism Forum 2003 as a contribution to improving tourism in general and accessible tourism in particular, in the context of the European Year of People with Disabilities.

1.2 The opinion set out a general framework of analysis, principles and proposals for defining the future of the tourism sector in its multiple and diverse forms. Ten specific aspects were identified, for each of which ten initiatives were proposed, giving a grand total of 100 concrete initiatives which individually and as a whole are intended to create sustainable and accessible tourism for the 21st century.

1.3 While keeping these objectives as a point of reference, the EESC proposes in this opinion on *Tourism policy and public-private cooperation* to identify those activities and measures needed to make the objectives feasible and to realise them in practice. The opinion also considers individuals, sectors, organisations, bodies and institutions that are responsible for implementing these measures, both in terms of their own specific responsibilities and tasks, and in cooperation with other players.

1.4 The aim of this opinion is to analyse and propose methods of cooperation between the public and private sectors, especially between public authorities and private companies and their business organisations, while also addressing issues relevant to other players in the tourism sector: workers and trade unions, consumer organisations, etc. Ultimately, the goal is to make all players accountable within their own remit and at the same time to find mechanisms and instruments that can

be used to coordinate activities with those of others involved in tourism management and policy, in order to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector.

1.5 It should be pointed out that even if the importance of tourism and the rate at which it is developing varies considerably across Europe, public-private cooperation has everywhere proved to be a good way of improving the quality, sustainability and competitiveness of tourism.

1.6 The public hearing held in Seville (Spain) on 15 April 2004 clearly demonstrated that there are many positive examples of successful public-private cooperation and that we must continue along this route if further improvements are to be made to the quality, sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism sector. These objectives must be given even greater priority in an enlarged Europe, where tourism will clearly play a key role.

2. Definition of stakeholders and sectors in the tourism industry: public and private sectors

2.1 It is not the purpose of this opinion to provide an exact definition of the public and private sectors, but by way of illustration and in order to focus the analysis, the Committee feels that it should provide a basic outline of both, so as to explain their position with regard to cooperation in the tourism sector.

2.2 The public sector is made up of the different tiers of administration – local, regional, national and international – as well as bodies and institutions that are mostly dependent on the former and are funded either by taxes or charges. This therefore covers a wide range of institutions, e.g. educational and promotional organisations, including some in the form of private companies or joint ventures, but with clearly defined remits. Their role in society is strictly regulated and the focus is ultimately on promoting the public good. A reference should be included here to the experience of public entities operating in the market, such as the *Paradores* in Spain and the *Pousadas* in Portugal (government-run hotels in rural beauty spots or historic sites). In general terms, the public sector provides a number of basic services with the aid of which companies must develop their business.

2.2.1 Of particular note are organisations responsible for tourism promotion and information, as this is an area where cooperation is essential in defining objectives and joint measures.

2.2.2 Where the public sector is concerned, the various forms of public-private cooperation can attract new types of funding for many activities, in particular those relating to promotion, building infrastructure, improving quality, etc.

2.3 The private sector meanwhile is made up not only of businesses – in their many forms as companies, cooperatives or individuals – but also, and very importantly, of the social partners, trade unions and associations of businesses and citizens, as consumers and parties with a direct stake in the welfare of society. Their interests and objectives are basically personal and individual, but they

also have social goals, insofar as their activities directly or indirectly affect society as a whole and they are thus accountable to society, both for their actions and for their omissions.

2.3.1 It is worth emphasising that this wide range of *businesses* can also be classified by *size*: large companies, micro-businesses, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Size seems to be relevant when the scope of cooperation is being defined, and it tends to be SMEs that are more interested in cooperation, perhaps because they are more dependent and therefore need more support in achieving their objectives. Another relevant factor may be the scope of their activities, given that local or regional businesses are more inclined to cooperate than large multinationals, which tend to be more rigid owing to their centralised structure and the uniformity of their management systems, and which have more diverse interests spread over different tourist locations and destinations.

2.3.2 Economic and social players can be classified according to the social groups they represent, i.e. employers and workers. It is clear that their associations are extremely important when it comes to setting up public-private partnerships, since while they defend basically individual interests, their collective interests are very close to those of the public sector and therefore easier to coordinate. The professionalism of their representatives can be and indeed usually is a key factor in ensuring the successful setting-up of a partnership.

2.3.3 The social sector provides a wide range of private organisations and associations of various types, which like the economic and social players are concerned with protecting individual and collective interests. These include consumer associations, environmental groups and neighbourhood associations. They tend to be good partners in cooperative projects developed in the tourism sector and are sometimes able to mobilise the other stakeholders.

2.3.4 While they are not strictly speaking the subject of this opinion, it should be pointed out that there are other feasible and desirable types of cooperation between the various levels of public authority on the one hand and different types of company on the other. Such cooperation could take vertical or horizontal form.

3. **Current situation**

3.1 The current range of possible relations between the public and private sectors comprises *four broad alternative scenarios* which are unlikely to occur in their pure form, but which indicate trends in practice.

3.1.1 **Antagonism:** This scenario is one of confrontational relations between public and private sectors, with each seeing the other, or thinking they see it, as opposing or obstructing its objectives and interests. The private sector often sees the public sector as thwarting its goal of profitability by failing to provide the infrastructure needed to develop its activities properly, and because of the paucity or poor quality of public services for tourists or the tourism industry. At other times, businesses see public authorities purely as the tax collector, seizing more and more from a sector that faces substantial price competition and causing distortion of competition vis-à-vis other

countries, regions or areas with different tax regimes, and they call for harmonisation of taxes such as VAT on tourism services. Ultimately, they feel they have to fight back against a public sector that reduces rather than promotes the sector's competitiveness.

3.1.1.1 In this situation of potentially antagonistic relations between the public and private sectors, public authorities may see the private tourism sector as creating problems and obstacles and distorting its public objectives in relation to social welfare, preservation and sustainability of natural resources, social cohesion and the responsibility of businesses towards local communities.

3.1.1.2 Through the media, society becomes more or less aware of the tension and the internal or external confrontations resulting from these relations, and a climate of conflict and ongoing mutual recrimination is generated that helps neither the private nor the public sector attain their objectives.

3.1.1.3 Obviously this situation is not ideal if tourism is to develop in a way that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and is to remain competitive; it is not satisfactory either from the standpoint of consumers and local people, or from that of businesses trying to build on tourism potential to create and distribute wealth.

3.1.2 **Co-existence:** In this scenario, public and private entities tolerate each other, work independently to achieve their respective objectives, respect each other's remits, fulfil their legal and social obligations and respect the rights of other players in the tourism industry. It is a scenario of mutual tolerance which, although preferable to the previous scenario, is clearly not enough to develop the sustainable tourism that the Committee considers to be appropriate for the 21st century. This is quite a common scenario in places where tourism is not the main economic activity, but supplements income earned from other sectors, or in towns and cities with diversified economies in which tourism alone accounts for only a small percentage of local economic activity.

3.1.3 **Coordination:** This scenario is characterised by some coordination of policies, strategies and measures between the different public and private players in the tourism sector, each of which has its own objectives, but realises that coherence and information exchange enhance the complementarity of their respective objectives and thus also benefit society. The main instruments of this scenario are information and communication, with respect to both policies and measures, between the different players in the tourism sector. Communication can take place through joint activities such as working groups, forums, information meetings, etc. This requires a greater degree of public-private cooperation, and the Committee believes that it promotes the objective of economic, social and environmental sustainability in tourism. It tends to exist in typical tourism contexts or locations, where tourism development is strong, with public and private players aware of the importance of tourism for their communities.

3.1.4 **Cooperation:** In this scenario, while each public or private stakeholder has its own objectives, they adopt joint objectives with respect to both practice as well as strategies and even policies. This requires consistency of objectives and a very sophisticated vision of tourism that is not

easy to achieve, requiring consistent application of economic, social and environmental sustainability criteria, both in the short term and in the medium and long terms. The Committee sees this as the most advanced scenario, towards which the new concept of sustainable tourism must move if it is to survive as an industry creating economic, social and environmental benefits.

3.1.4.1 Various instruments can be used to achieve this cooperation: joint ventures, tourist boards, foundations, joint institutions, councils, partnerships, etc. But in each case the pooling of experience, know-how and long-term investment projects are key aspects of cooperation and optimising efforts. It is important to note that this cooperation is most effective at local level, where public and private interests coincide most concretely and directly. It is here that the right environment can be created for tourism to drive local development, creating high-quality and socially sustainable jobs.

3.1.4.2 One of the activities where this level of cooperation can be seen most frequently is the joint creation of tourism products by public and private sectors. There are examples of highly successful products created on the basis of cooperation.

3.2 Looking at the current context, all four scenarios described exist in real life, sometimes in pure form, but more often with combinations of features, producing a variety of intermediate situations. This opinion proposes that cooperation is a feasible and desirable objective for the European and global tourism industry, since it improves the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism. It is also necessary to recognise and improve the good practice which, in Europe and all over the world, is being achieved in tourism, sometimes at the instigation of the public sector and in many cases promoted and created by the private sector.

3.3 Generally speaking it can be said that in the case of those tourist destinations and activities where public-private cooperation is the basis for improving quality, planning development and responding to crisis situations, and in many similar cases, the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of measures is considerably enhanced, thus making the location or activity more competitive.

3.3.1 On the other hand, where there is confrontation, lack of coordination or simple ignorance, which can happen sometimes consciously or unconsciously, this just exacerbates problems, delays solutions, reduces competitiveness and reduces cost-effectiveness.

3.3.2 Various studies have shown and confirmed that tourists perceive the quality of services received during a trip or holiday as being 50% dependent on the services provided by public bodies and 50% dependent on the services provided by the private sector, principally businesses, through their employees. The way in which tourists perceive different quality indicators and the impact of these on their overall perception of the quality of a product is endorsed, for example, by various studies carried out by the municipality of Calvià and others in Spain as part of the Plans for Touristic Excellence.

3.4 It is encouraging to note the steady trend towards cooperation as opposed to confrontation, which was perhaps more common in the early years of the tourism industry, during periods of rapid growth where there were no restrictions on development of the best locations on the coast or in the countryside. There were periods when the drive for short-term profits eclipsed certain aspects of sustainability which even the public sector was unable to take into account, incorporate into its strategy and develop in cooperation with the private sector.

3.4.1 Social awareness of long-term factors and limitations, especially with regard to protecting natural resources, has been growing, and tourism practices are much more consistent with social objectives than they were in the past.

4. Objectives of public-private cooperation today

4.1 Generally speaking, it can be said that the basic aim of cooperation must be to promote and incorporate the objectives that are an intrinsic part of each party's remit, its strategies and plans and which constitute its *raison d'être* in society now and in the future. Each party must bring its own objectives – both individual and collective – and ensure that they are integrated with those of its partners.

4.2 Various *types of objectives* can be identified in relation to tourism cooperation.

4.2.1 **Sectoral.** As has already been shown many times and in various ways, the tourism industry is a sector of strategic importance for achieving multiple objectives that are at the very heart of the European Union, its policies and its will to make Europe a better place now and for future generations.

4.2.1.1 Because it has a direct impact on the economy, society and the environment where it takes place, tourism development can and must be a priority instrument for improving the quality of life of Europe's citizens. However, to ensure that this potential is realised in practice in the long term, tourism must meet certain sustainability requirements that all stakeholders – public and private bodies, businesses and consumers – must respect. The basic objective of public-private cooperation can and must be to ensure the long-term viability and competitiveness of the tourism sector.

4.2.1.2 It should be noted in particular that public-private cooperation has proved very effective in managing situations of decline or even crises in tourism in mature destinations that risk losing their wealth-generating potential. Joint action by all stakeholders – which is essential - increases the efficacy and visibility of the measures taken.

4.2.1.3 Moreover, it is becoming apparent that in emergency situations such as **9/11** in New York and the very recent **3/11** in Madrid it is necessary to call upon all public and private operators and decision-makers to join forces in order to mitigate the adverse impact on tourism of such tragedies.

4.2.1.4 One area in which alliances and public-private cooperation in the sectoral environment could prove effective is transport, where the massive increase in low-cost airlines has led to a fall in transport costs in general. Public-private alliances must therefore safeguard service quality, jobs and safety where this kind of product is concerned.

4.2.1.5 While providing training for professionals working in a specific sector is a clear objective in all human activity, it is even more important in a sector such as tourism which has a clear and important human relations component. Public-private cooperation in this area is essential as it is in the interest of both sectors to improve the training and professionalism of employees.

4.2.2 **Social.** It is not possible to set objectives for public-private cooperation without taking into account the social objectives that any human activity should entail. Specifically, local development and job creation are fundamental objectives in tourism and therefore for cooperation in the tourism sector.

4.2.2.1 The fact that tourism is an economic activity based on personal services means that any new tourism activity will create jobs, although high-quality and sustainable tourism is only feasible with high-quality jobs.

4.2.2.2 Improving the social conditions of local communities visited by tourists must certainly be one of the objectives of effective cooperation between the public and private sectors. Several European regions will be affected by and have to adjust to recent and future changes to the Common Agriculture Policy. Farm holidays should perhaps be promoted as a way of combining traditional farming activity with a new activity – tourism – which can increase profitability. Consideration must also be given to promoting tourism as a potential new activity in areas affected by the restructuring of industry, mining or similar activities. The Committee will be called upon to draft an own-initiative opinion examining this alternative in depth for the regions concerned.

4.2.2.3 Protecting the cultural, archaeological and architectural heritage is perhaps one social objective which can best be served by public-private cooperation. This is certainly the case of the *Red de Paradores de España* and *Pousadas* in Portugal, thanks to which a large number of monuments have been restored and opened to the public, generating unquestionable wealth in the surrounding area. This is a way of keeping public assets in public hands while at the same time ensuring that they are appreciated and enjoyed. This also applies to rural areas, which many SMEs see as a business opportunity. However, such activities do not necessarily have to be carried out by public entities alone; indeed, there are many examples of palaces and monuments that have been restored privately and are now profitable thanks to tourism, as the Committee's study group saw during the visit organised in connection with the Seville hearing. The countries that have just joined the EU all have an extraordinary heritage that must be restored. This is a new and exciting opportunity to promote tourism while protecting heritage. Public-private cooperation in all its forms has a very important role to play in achieving this objective.

4.2.2.4 Tourism can also benefit from public-private cooperation in other sectors. Thus, for example, given the valuable contribution made by the catering industry to prosperity and cultural and tourist heritage, the promotion of public-private cooperation to enhance high-quality agrifood development and designations of origin will have an impact on tourism products in the future.

4.2.2.5 One positive step could be the widespread implementation of the Code of Ethical Tourism, approved a few years ago by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), as this would highlight the need for public-private cooperation.

4.2.3 **Economic.** It is generally accepted that the economic dimension is a key aspect of tourism. As already noted, the tourism industry has proved to be a powerful engine for job creation and wealth virtually worldwide, but especially in Europe, and in even more concentrated form in the Mediterranean countries. Sustainability here requires a strategic, long-term – not short- or medium-term – vision; it means developing tourism products with a view to current and future competitiveness; and that they should be able to generate profits in the short, medium and long term and stable and permanent employment year-round in the short, medium and long term. The common objectives of effective cooperation will thus be to seek and maintain the competitiveness and economic profitability of the tourism sector.

4.2.3.1 Information and communication technologies (ICT) are another area among the tourism sector's economic objectives where cooperation is vital in order to meet the objectives of both tourist destinations, usually represented by the public sector, and of the economic activity of selling tourist services, usually represented by businesses. Universally accessible tourist information, including in peripheral regions, is essential if the sector is to be competitive.

4.2.3.2 Where the economic objectives of cooperation are concerned, it must be remembered that public sector intervention is essential a) to prevent unfair competition and b) to level out any aspects of competition, e.g. tax arrangements, which may undermine the transparency of the market.

4.2.4 **Environmental.** Tourism is an industry, perhaps the only industry, whose basic product is "natural attraction", made up of a combination of factors in which the perception of nature, of its various settings and landscapes, its biodiversity, and ultimately, respect for the environment, play a key role in ensuring the quality and suitability of the product sought by consumers, i.e. the tourists. It is perfectly feasible and desirable for both public and private players to gear cooperation to maintaining these conditions, which ensure both the sustainability of natural resources and their rational and sustainable use, making it possible for them to yield profits.

4.2.4.1 Environmental protection is one area in which public-private cooperation could be instrumental in achieving the objective of environmental quality. Recent events such as the Prestige disaster have demonstrated the need for environmental protection in the private as well as the public sector.

4.3 Finally, the possible objectives of adequate public-private cooperation must always be consistent with the concept of sustainability, which comprises on the one hand the three dimensions of the economy, society and nature, and on the other hand the three timescales (short, medium and long term), and participation of all stakeholders in the tourism sector as an integral factor. It is sustainable development policy and measures that form the basis for cooperation.

5. Principles and criteria of cooperation

5.1 A number of *principles* must govern cooperation between the public and private sectors in relation to tourism.

5.1.1 Remits: It is obvious that, in order to establish a solid, lasting partnership, the various stakeholders must be able to pursue independently their own objectives, determined by mutual agreement, and that their remits must therefore be recognised, whether in the form of an explicit legal mandate, delegation of powers or just formal or informal representation.

5.1.2 Co-responsibility: The different stakeholders must be either directly or indirectly concerned by or involved in the situation for which the partnership has been set up.

5.1.3 Voluntary nature of cooperation: Only those who freely choose to be active participants in a partnership are bound by it.

5.1.4 Democracy: Rules for decision-taking and representation must be very clear and consistent with the principles of participatory democracy.

5.2 The operating *criteria* for partnerships so as to ensure that they meet their objectives include:

5.2.1 Concrete objectives: i.e. explicit, specific and, if possible, quantifiable in economic terms, with a fixed timescale and mutually agreed.

5.2.2 Relevance: The objectives must be important for all stakeholders, whether directly or indirectly.

5.2.3 Monitoring of results: It is important for stakeholders to be able to see clearly the results of their participation in a partnership; otherwise they lose interest and withdraw.

5.2.4 Proportionality: It is essential that the involvement of stakeholders should be in proportion to the scale of the challenges faced.

6. Instruments and types of association and cooperation

6.1 In order to describe instruments and types of association, it is first necessary to establish the ideal level of cooperation, i.e. the level at which it makes sense, which means analysing and defining the context in which the challenge is occurring, in which a solution can be found and in which the expertise of all stakeholders can be brought to bear. Thus the context will be local if the problem is purely local and if the expertise to address and apply solutions is available locally. The same applies at the regional and state levels.

6.2 Another basic feature is inclusiveness. It is important that all stakeholders can contribute something to the solution, whether it be means, information or coordination of activities.

6.3 Specific *types of partnership* might be:

6.3.1 Informal: The stakeholders set up an informal strategic alliance, working group, forum or similar arrangement, without legal personality. Decisions are taken by a majority, but should not be binding or create obligations for those involved, except for those voluntarily entered into.

6.3.2 Formal: Such arrangements may take the form of consortiums, foundations, public entities, joint ventures, associations, etc. They are governed by rules that lay down the conditions of agreements and their implementation.

6.3.3 Ensuring that economic and social stakeholders are involved in defining a permanent framework of labour relations based on rights, and developing collective bargaining, will have a positive impact on the competitiveness, profitability, stability and social and economic efficiency of tourism. Economic and social stakeholders must also be involved in social dialogue, along with public authorities and institutions, whenever the topics under discussion call for tripartite involvement.

7. Role of networks of stakeholders: of towns and cities, businesses, specific projects

7.1 In today's globalised world, economic activity cannot be conducted in isolation; this principle also applies to towns and cities and, in the present case, tourist destinations and operators. According to experts in this area, in territorial terms the new global economy will be based on networks of towns and cities in order to facilitate coordination. Although during the early phase tourist destinations employ competitive strategies to attract funding, increase sales and raise their international profile – in short, to be better, more competitive and faster growing – in a later phase they tend to become aware of the need to link up with other destinations for the purpose of joint promotion and lobbying of national governments and/or international organisations.

7.2 More and more the exchange of experience between tourist destinations around the world is considered necessary in order to work towards common objectives of sustainability and competitiveness. There are a number of positive aspects to this, the most important of which are perhaps the ability to prevent strategic mistakes and the incorporation of the best instruments of

sustainable management. Networks are a complementary and alternative way of representing cities, businesses or institutions. ICTs strengthen these networks by allowing their members to have an informal, instantaneous and valuable relationship.

7.3 Networking is not always without problems and negative aspects: sometimes there are conflicts of interest which hinder cooperation, while, at other times, the strongest members of the network are the ones that reap the most benefits from it.

7.4 For businesses, like cities, networking is a powerful tool for providing and exchanging information, making them more competitive and raising their profile vis-à-vis public institutions.

7.5 A number of specific tourism projects are network-based. One example is the European Union's URB-AL programme, which aims to set up networks of cities to work on many areas of the economy, society and urban development. These areas sometimes promote the exchange of experiences of sustainable tourism.

8. **Positive examples of public-private cooperation in the sphere of European tourism**

8.1 Various positive examples of public-private cooperation were analysed during the public hearing held in Seville on 15 April 2004. The following should be mentioned in particular:

8.1.1 **Turisme de Barcelona:** This company was set up in 1993 by the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Promoció Foundation with a view to promoting Barcelona as a tourist destination. In the ten years that have passed since then, Turisme de Barcelona has helped to improve both the image and tourist facilities of the city. This positive development is reflected in the growth of supply and demand, the improved hotel occupancy rate and other indicators. However, the most revealing aspect is perhaps the fact that over these ten years the contribution of institutional budget appropriations has fallen from 70% of the total budget to just 20%, with the remaining income generated internally by Turisme de Barcelona's own activity as an intermediary in the hotel room market. A number of successful tourist products warrant a special mention, such as the Barcelona Bus Turistic, Barcelona Card and Barcelona Pass, as well as programmes such as the Barcelona Convention Bureau, Barcelona Shopping Line, etc. These products undoubtedly owe their success to the climate of close cooperation and understanding between the tourism industry and the public authorities, which are working together to improve tourist facilities in Barcelona.

8.1.2 **Institute for High-Quality Tourism in Spain (ICTE):** The ICTE dates back to the early 1990s when various instruments designed to actively improve quality were created. In 2000 the Institute for High-Quality Tourism in Spain was set up in response to evidence that emerging tourist destinations in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, etc. were beginning to pose a threat to the Spanish tourism industry's position as leader. A clear strategy was chosen of overall quality based on the need to integrate all tourism stakeholders in all aspects of its work. All its activities involve those players

linked to the particular sub-sector: hotels, restaurants, travel agents, transport companies, rural tourism companies, golf clubs, health resorts, municipalities and provinces. Today, more than 250 business associations, national government, the Autonomous Communities and city councils, more than 3,000 tourism companies receiving technical assistance and 463 companies and bodies with a high-quality tourism certificate participate in the Integrated System of High-Quality Tourist Destinations in Spain. As with Barcelona, the ICTE is a positive example of public-private cooperation as a way of improving overall quality, an essential element of tourist activity.

8.1.3 **Other examples provided at the Seville hearing:** Andalusia's public-private cooperation model, which has now been in existence for twenty years and has resulted in five cooperation agreements covering all sectors of production, including tourism. This model is based on cooperation between the Autonomous Community's public administration, the Employers' Confederation of Andalusia and the main Andalusian trade unions, the General Workers' Union (UGT) and Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), and has created a climate of trust and stability, both of which are essential for tourist activity.

8.2 As an example of local policy, the Committee welcomes the fact that, during its Seville hearing on cooperation between the public and private sectors, the Mayor of Seville once again called on economic and social stakeholders and the tourism sector in general to draw up a pact to ensure that all stakeholders are fully involved in shaping, drafting, planning, implementing and evaluating tourism policy in their particular area. This initiative could be a point of reference, along with other initiatives already in the pipeline, for major cities and towns of varying sizes when promoting cooperation at local level.

8.3 Several examples are available of successful cooperation projects undertaken in the field of social tourism with the aim of facilitating universal access to holidays and tourism. The holiday cheque scheme overseen in France by the National Agency for Holiday Cheques (ANCV) and in Hungary by the National Society for Leisure Activities is one such case, as are the tourist programmes for older people developed by the *Instituto Nacional para o Aproveitamento do Tempo Livre dos Trabalhadores* (INATEL – national institute which helps workers to make best use of their free time) in Portugal, the tourism programme for older people run by the social services office (INSERSO) in Spain, the promotion of youth hostels in Brussels, supported by the Commission for the French Community (COCOF) and various public-sector training programmes, and the help provided for renovating holiday centres that are members of associations such as the Youth Tourism Centre (CTG) in Italy.

8.4 There are without doubt many other positive examples of public-private cooperation throughout Europe and the world, such as those listed in the WTO and Canadian Tourism Commission's excellent publication entitled *Cooperation and Partnerships in Tourism – A Global Perspective*, which was published in 2003. This publication provides 18 positive examples of cooperation in tourism at global level, all of which warrant special consideration in terms of demonstrating good practice.

9. Promoting cooperation at European level

9.1 The newly enlarged Europe, from every angle and, in particular, in terms of tourism, is a very dynamic environment in which a multitude of changes are taking place, affecting the structures of both supply and demand. At the Lisbon Summit, the EU embarked on a strategy to make Europe the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world over the coming years, capable of generating sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. In order to achieve this ambitious objective, greater cooperation both amongst the institutions and within the public and private sectors is needed. In the past, tourism has demonstrated its ability to create jobs and generate well-being and must continue to fulfil this role in the future in the 25-strong European Union and following subsequent waves of accession. The Committee would invite the Commission to study the possibility of creating a **European Consultative Council on Tourism** as a concrete platform from which to develop the principle of cooperation at European level.

9.2 This Council could comprise representatives of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions), the European Youth Council and the Member States, equal numbers of representatives of employers' organisations and trade unions, as well as representatives of European consumer, environment, disability and social tourism organisations and universities, and renowned experts in the field.

9.3 The European Consultative Council on Tourism could gather and analyse data on the past and future development of tourism, suggest ways of supporting and participating in action undertaken by the Commission, provide a reference framework for cooperation to be further developed by the various stakeholders in other tourist-related sectors of the Union and plan the convening of the European Tourism Forum and the follow-up to the agreements it reaches.

9.4 Should this proposal be deemed appropriate by the Commission, the Committee would be keen to contribute to putting it in place and making it fully operative in time for the 2005 European Tourism Forum.

10. Final comments

10.1 In today's globalised and yet specialised world, it is necessary to constantly re-think the models on which economic, social, land planning and urban development activities are based. This applies to tourism too, which raises many challenges in terms of quality, sustainability and competitiveness for all the stakeholders concerned.

10.2 The Committee believes that only if the various public and private stakeholders adopt a basic attitude of cooperation will it be possible to meet the major challenges facing all human activity, but in particular tourism, owing to its strategic nature, its essential role as a human service provider and as a vector of cultural exchange.

10.3 Public-private cooperation is an increasingly important aspect of positive action in the tourism sector. This must be encouraged in as many ways as possible as it cannot but help the sector's objectives to be met. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to incorporate this aspect into the way in which they respond to the major changes taking place in the world today.

10.4 The Committee welcomes the European Commission's initiative to continue to hold the European Tourism Forum every year, as this is a platform where cooperation guidelines and criteria can be defined at European level in conjunction with stakeholders in the sector, in particular economic and social stakeholders, authorities and other bodies. The idea is that such guidelines and criteria will lead to similar initiatives in the various EU Member States, regions and towns and even between sectors and regions themselves.

10.5 The Committee hopes to contribute towards cooperation in the tourism sector by promoting encounters, dialogue and agreement between tourism representatives, in particular economic and social stakeholders, national, regional and local authorities and bodies and associations involved in sustainable tourism, such as consumers, environmentalists, the social economy and people with disabilities. It will also continue to cooperate with the WTO and the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS). The Committee therefore reiterates its offer to act as a meeting point for all parties who see tourism as an individual right which must be considered not only as an industry and economic activity, but also as an element of personal and human development and understanding, reconciliation and peace between peoples.

10.6 The Committee intends to support, through an annual declaration, the World Tourism Day initiated by the WTO. This year, the Committee's contribution to this event, and to the 2004 European Tourism Forum to be held in Budapest, comes in the shape of this opinion, which may be considered as the Seville Declaration on Tourism Policy and Public-Private Cooperation.

Brussels, 15 September 2004.

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