



European Economic and Social Committee

INT/317
A renewed EU tourism
policy: towards a stronger
partnership for European
tourism

Brussels, 14 December 2006

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Communication from the Commission – A renewed EU tourism policy: towards a stronger
partnership for European tourism**

COM(2006) 134 final

On 17 March 2006, the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Communication from the Commission – A renewed EU tourism policy: towards a stronger partnership for European tourism
(COM(2006) 134 final).

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 November 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Mendoza, and the co-rapporteur was Mr Barros Vale.

At its 431st plenary session, held on 13 and 14 December (meeting of 14 December), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 75 votes to six with 14 abstentions.

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes and commends the Commission communication "**A renewed EU tourism policy: towards a stronger partnership for European tourism**" and supports the Commission's pledge to clearly consolidate tourism policy and strategy for the next few years.
- 1.2 The Committee appreciates the Commission's effort to briefly summarise a large number of documents, opinions and debates. The result is a satisfactory and clear description for the general public of this renewed tourism policy.
- 1.3 The Commission is correct to tie this new tourism policy in with the renewed Lisbon strategy and to set improving competitiveness and sustainability as its objectives.
- 1.4 We also endorse the challenges identified in the Commission communication and the proposed means of addressing them. The proposed approach is for all players to be involved through various means of collaboration and competitive collaboration, and this involvement is considered the cornerstone of the new tourism policy.
- 1.5 The Committee considers the Commission's undertaking to implement this new policy through collaboration, launching new support measures and coordination between stakeholders to be appropriate, but believes the specific approach and implementing tools should be more fully developed. The Enterprise DG must play a more active role and lead the introduction of a large number of Europe-wide initiatives.

- 1.6 The Committee once again proposes and recommends that this cooperation policy should be further developed by setting up a **European Tourism Board** and looking at the possibilities for establishing a **European Tourism Agency**.
- 1.7 The Committee welcomes the Commission's intention to improve use of the available financial instruments, but a proposal is needed for a programme to implement the tourism objectives, which are accurately identified. As a specific example in the sphere of social tourism, the Committee feels that there is already sufficient scope for initiating some cross-border pooling of experience in the form of a pilot project.
- 1.8 The Committee has high hopes of the work currently under way on the European Agenda 21 for Tourism, a document that should complete and consolidate the general policy of sustainability in European tourism. Creating databases of good practice, in relation both to sustainability and to other factors such as tourism quality, creativity and competitiveness, are regarded as appropriate instruments that the Commission should promote.
- 1.9 With respect to statistics, the Committee proposes setting up a network of tourism observatories that would not only provide sectoral data, but also provide a strategic and forward-looking vision and anticipate future action.
- 1.10 The Committee is prepared to continue working on tourism along the lines set out in the Commission communication, and invites the other European institutions, the Member States, local and regional authorities, and sectoral stakeholders - companies and trade unions - and the general public to be involved in understanding and supporting tourism as a universal right and economic activity with strategic importance for Europe's future.

2. **Commission communication**

To better appreciate and understand what the Commission wishes to communicate to all European actors and institutions, we will briefly summarise the text of the communication and its main points.

2.1 **Tourism and the renewed Lisbon strategy**

- 2.1.1 **The challenge of growth and jobs.** Section 1 of the Commission communication links the new European tourism policy with the need to implement the renewed Lisbon strategy. The important role currently played by tourism in maintaining and creating jobs is explicitly recognised, and tourism is rightly identified as an economic activity whose contribution to full employment can continue and even increase. The Commission communication analyses the structure of the sector and points to the diversity of services and professions involved in its development, and the substantial contribution of micro, small and medium-sized businesses to tourism. The communication notes that the particular characteristics of tourism

favour job flexibility, without ignoring the need for compensatory measures to safeguard the stability and quality of employment in the sector.

As the Commission points out, tourism plays a key role in European regional development, and the sustainability factor has positive effects in various economic and social spheres. In this respect, the European Agenda 21 for Tourism, a Commission initiative currently in preparation, will certainly serve as an appropriate guide and instrument ensuring the sustainable development of tourism.

Another factor to bear in mind in terms of tourism's contribution to the Lisbon strategy is EU enlargement and its positive impact on job creation and growth.

However, all this can be achieved only with the participation and collaboration of all private and public players at every level, which is the cornerstone of the new European tourism policy proposed by the Commission.

- 2.1.2 **The challenges facing tourism.** The Commission communication sets out various general challenges for European tourism which have been created by major changes in European and global society.

The first challenge relates to population structure, which is changing radically, so that many more people – especially people over 50 – will be travelling and tourism will have to adapt to the new demands of this population group.

Another big challenge is that of new destinations emerging at global level, making it necessary to adapt products and services to the new market situation.

Finally, there is the need for tourism to develop under sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural conditions.

The Commission communication notes that improving competitiveness is the appropriate way of addressing these challenges so as to realise the aims of the Lisbon strategy.

- 2.1.3 **Dialogue and collaboration.** The Commission communication advocates dialogue and collaboration between all players in order to achieve the objective of improving competitiveness. All those involved in collaboration, at every level, are necessary and central to action in the sphere of tourism.

- 2.2 **A new European tourism policy.** In its communication, the Commission proposes that a new European tourism policy should be adopted with the aim of improving competitiveness and creating more and better jobs under sustainable conditions in Europe and the world. To achieve this it calls for dialogue, coordination and collaboration at all levels.

2.2.1 **Mainstreaming measures affecting tourism.** The Commission communication sets out three types of measure:

- better regulation through extended impact assessment, screening of legislative proposals and simplification of existing legislation;
- coordination of all Community policies affecting tourism, and consulting and engaging in interactive dialogue with all the parties concerned;
- improving use of the various EU financial instruments available: the ERDF, the Cohesion Funds, the ESF, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and others that can enhance the sustainable development of tourism.

The Commission communication proposes that key tasks be entrusted to its own specialised departments in coordinating initiatives taken in both the public and private sectors. These include in particular the work of maintaining interactive information in the tourism sector and achieving cooperation between all parties so that tourism can benefit from all Community financial instruments.

2.3 **Promoting sustainable tourism.** The Commission communication considers drawing up a proposal for a European Agenda 21 for tourism to be an essential aspect of framing the new European tourism policy. Work on drawing up the proposal is currently under way and should be completed in 2007.

Pending completion of these strategic efforts, the Commission provides for immediate implementation of various specific actions. Of particular note are measures to facilitate the exchange of good practice in tourism in relation to various issues - accessibility and sustainability, sport, culture, economic recovery, EU enlargement, public-private cooperation and social tourism in Europe - which have been addressed in at least seven EESC own-initiative opinions.

2.4 **Enhancing the understanding and visibility of tourism.** The Commission communication proposes various basic policies for improving the strategic importance of tourism within general European policy. These include:

- improving the availability of tourism statistics, in particular the Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs);
- continuing to promote European tourist destinations, for example through the internet portal created for this purpose by the Commission, which in the near future will undoubtedly serve as a valuable tool for promoting tourism products, cultural and sporting events and a wide range of advertising possibilities;
- improving the visibility of tourism as a common objective, through various joint measures with the Member States, including annual organisation of the European Tourism Forum, which has been held regularly since 2002. The Commission expresses a clear intention to continue efforts to publicise its proposals, conclusions or simply discuss

the issues that are of concern to the sector. It should also be noted that during each Council presidency various measures have been taken to increase the visibility and presence of tourism in Europe.

2.5 **Conclusion of the communication**

The Commission communication concludes with the basic observation that there is a need for full cooperation between all public and private players with respect to the adoption and practical implementation of tourism policies. Once more, the recommendation that collaboration should be established at every level is a precondition for improving competitiveness, which will ensure a sustainable European tourism sector in the long term. The Commission's objective in presenting the communication is thus quite clear.

3. **General comments**

3.1 Tourism deservedly figures strongly in the documents – both strategic and technical – of all the European institutions, but this is still far from commensurate with its current importance as an economic activity and its future potential in Europe. This role transcends purely economic considerations because it includes conspicuous social and cultural factors, and issues relating to heritage and integration of Europe's citizens, given that tourism is a cross-cutting sector with implications for many strategies, policies and Community measures.

3.2 It is important to point out that although tourism is not at the moment a common policy of the European Union, it is still the case that various European institutions are presenting measures and actions that have an impact on tourism or use it as an instrument to achieve some of the main EU objectives. The new constitutional Treaty awaiting adoption represents a step forward in recognising the complementary and coordinating role of national policies in promoting company competitiveness and acknowledging the economic dimension of tourism.

3.3 Tourism has been addressed in the different European institutions as follows:

- The **European Parliament** has adopted a series of very different resolutions on tourism and its impact on employment and the economy, for instance the Resolution on "Tourism and Development" and the Resolution on "Prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism".
- The **Council of the European Union** has addressed tourism on a number of occasions in conclusions and action plans, basically to emphasise the need for sustainability, competitiveness and job creation in tourism. Special mention should be made of the Council conclusions of 7 July 2006 on the Commission communication on the new EU tourism policy; the Council welcomes this policy and calls on the Commission to play an active role in coordinating various policies.
- The **European Commission** has published various communications, set up, consolidated and managed the European Tourism Forums, held conferences on various topics, such as

social tourism and the Agenda 21 for European Tourism, and organised many other activities.

- The **Committee of the Regions** has presented opinions, for example on the Commission communications "Working together for the future of European tourism" and "Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism".
- The **European Economic and Social Committee** has always taken and continues to take a particular interest in tourism-related matters, as evidenced by some 11 opinions adopted on tourism since 1999, the Committee's active participation in various European Tourism Forums convened by the Commission, and its involvement and promotion of numerous events on various aspects of tourism, e.g. the celebration of World Tourism Day in 2005 in Brussels and 2006 in León. Of particular interest is the cooperation between the EESC and other bodies on all the initiatives that they have launched in relation to tourism.

3.4 The present EESC opinion is intended not just to be a critical evaluation of the Commission communication and a presentation of relevant recommendations arising from the ensuing debate, but also to analyse existing initiatives and make clear proposals. Thus although the communication is evaluated positively, the opinion tries to focus on specific measures that taken together constitute a tourism policy. Without actually being concerned with tourism directly, there are aspects of current European policy that have critical implications for the development of tourism: free movement of people, services and goods, transport and the environment, among others. All of these measures must go into building a competitive and sustainable tourism policy.

3.5 In general terms, the message of this opinion is that:

- tourism is a right of every citizen, as set out in the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, and brings with it an obligation to conform to good practice;
- it is a right that also generates direct and indirect wealth and profitability, in particular for small and medium-sized companies, and is thus a strategic industry for Europe which has proved sound;
- the quality of services provided by operators in the sector and the responsibility of users towards local communities are values that we must maintain as the basis for its continuing existence;
- tourism has, or should have, a positive impact on local and regional economies, as well as on social, cultural and environmental conditions, and thus provides a means of understanding other cultures and different ways of being and behaving; it also acts as an instrument for interregional cooperation;
- tourism is a dynamic sector and major source of employment now and for the future, with the potential to create good quality, stable jobs with social rights;
- tourism is not immune from problems such as overcrowding and seasonality, which lead to a loss of competitiveness;
- we believe in the need for an Agenda 21 for European Tourism that is clear-sighted and has ambitious objectives;

- the European tourism model is an internal necessity and could serve as a global point of reference if it is based not on rules but on values of quality, sustainability, accessibility, etc., which are freely taken on board by tourist destinations and all stakeholders;
- the European tourism model is based on and enriched by the variety of destinations, by the different approaches to tourism, and by the diverse forms of tourism;
- this European tourism model that we are advocating is an effective instrument for promoting peace and understanding between peoples.

4. **Specific comments**

- 4.1 The Commission communication gives a general overview of the foundations, challenges, policies, main measures and general modus operandi of a new tourism policy for Europe. Incorporating all this into a rather short communication certainly involved considerable work to summarise the material and required analysis of many documents, opinions and debates. It should be emphasised that the ultimate aim of clearly informing society about the Commission's basic views on tourism has been achieved, as well as the measures to be carried out in this complex sector.
- 4.2 The arguments presented in the communication in support of this new tourism policy seem appropriate, based as they are on the renewed Lisbon strategy and its two main axes, growth and employment. If attainment of these objectives is the general Community strategy, setting out the contribution of tourism to that strategy certainly means strengthening its role and establishing the right basis for its development.
- 4.3 Perhaps it would have been useful for the Commission communication also to analyse the role of tourism in major Community declarations and in the European constitutional treaty, trying to see how current tourism policy is defined in those documents and what the significance of new European tourism policy is. It should not be forgotten that the Member States and the regions have repeatedly indicated that they wish to maintain their responsibility for tourism, but still allow the European Union to play a catalytic role in certain areas of joint interest so as to improve the competitiveness of Europe's tourism sector. One current request that is being implemented and refined, for instance, is the setting-up and management of an internet portal to promote Europe as a tourism destination. Joint measures are needed at a time when internal frontiers are becoming more porous.
- 4.4 The challenges mentioned by the Commission are certainly the most important ones that will be faced by tourism in the coming decades. The list might have been longer, but certainly the key challenge of improving competitiveness is broad enough to serve as the basis for addressing other major challenges, such as enhancing quality, reducing seasonality or improving the skills of people working in the tourism industry. Vocational training and improving the qualifications of people employed in the tourism sector is particularly important within the framework of the Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme. This will make the sector more competitive and ensure high-quality services.

- 4.5 The Commission communication repeatedly calls for collaboration, and as indicated in the title strengthening partnership should be proposed as the linchpin and hallmark of the new tourism policy. It is particularly important to emphasise the role of trade unions and employers' organisations, which must be included in partnership arrangements, and asked to take part in all debates and forums, and in the implementation of general measures to improve the tourism sector. It would also be helpful to create a database of good tourism practice as a means of exchanging successful experiences as part of collaboration between all stakeholders. By the same token, it would be useful to promote permanent networks of tourist destinations and cities, motivated by the joint aim of improving competitiveness. The Committee welcomes the introduction of the "European destinations of excellence" and urges that this idea should include proper management of social and labour relations and participation of trades unions and employers' organisations at the selected destination.
- 4.6 The Commission undertakes to implement this new policy on the basis of cooperation, of launching new, specific support measures and of coordination between actors. However, it might be necessary to give more details of the actual ways in which these three approaches will be executed. In the Committee's view, the Enterprise DG has a key role to play with respect to these tasks of coordinating all European policies that directly or indirectly affect tourism, but it is up to the Commission to decide which body should be responsible for this coordination. The Committee also considers that the Commission should play a more active role in introducing Europe-wide initiatives. Here in particular, the Committee has on several occasions proposed setting up a **European Tourism Board** and looking at the possibilities for establishing a **European Tourism Agency**.
- 4.7 The Commission communication makes it very clear that enhancing competitiveness is an objective and a necessity for the European tourism sector. Growing global competition in the sector is eroding the profitability of operators. Thus maintaining Europe's leading position in the global tourism industry will require substantial efforts in the future to innovate, enhance quality, support creativity and improve the productivity of all factors and players.
- 4.8 The Committee considers that the Commission communication does not pay adequate attention to the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the new scenario for tourism, both from the perspective of consumers and of companies and sectoral stakeholders. Research and development work in the tourism sector to improve the use of such technologies must be a priority in the next few years.
- 4.9 The Committee very much welcomes the Commission's proposal to improve regulation, but it must be borne in mind that less regulation does not always mean better regulation. Collective bargaining will have to be strengthened in areas identified by the social partners if labour regulations and standards in the sector are to be adapted.

- 4.10 The evident willingness to adopt concrete measures and in particular to improve the use of the European financial instruments available is important, but there is a need for more specific information and a programme should be proposed for the precise purpose of implementing the major European tourism objectives, which the communication accurately identifies. It must be ensured that the funds allocated to tourism are used effectively and efficiently to achieve the objectives.
- 4.11 The role ascribed to the "**Agenda 21 for European Tourism**" is of particular importance in the Commission communication, since this document is intended to serve as the basis for strategies, programmes and actions relating to the sustainable development of tourism. A long document is anticipated that will no doubt shed light on many different questions and issues of an economic, social and environmental nature. This document should carefully consider the key issues of limits on growth, the sustainable rate of growth of tourist destinations, and the protection of the coast and other sensitive natural areas. It should also put forward viable and sustainable proposals.
- 4.12 The Commission communication places great emphasis on tourism statistics, but these may need to be complemented by studies with a clear strategic and forward-looking approach that identify trends, draw conclusions and provide for future action. Setting up one or more networked tourism observatories at European level could help to meet this need in the sector. There is a need for tourism statistics to pay more attention to employment variables.
- 4.13 The Commission communication clearly states the need to improve the visibility, understanding and acceptance of tourism in European society. As already observed in the EESC opinion entitled the Katowice Declaration, and in the opinion on "Tourism and culture: two forces for growth" and other EESC documents, communication campaigns are also called for to inform and motivate all European citizens, in particular young people.

Brussels, 14 December 2006.

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