



European Economic and Social Committee

INT/808
Nautical and maritime tourism

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Nautical and maritime tourism diversification strategies
(Exploratory opinion)

Rapporteur: **Tony ZAHRA**

Consultation	Maltese presidency of the Council, 19/09/2016
Legal basis	Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Single Market, Production and Consumption
Adopted in section	09/03/2017
Adopted at plenary	30/03/2017
Plenary session No	524
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	178/0/0

1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 In view of handicaps such as distance, accessibility and insularity, the EESC believes that a favourable fiscal regime for islands should be sought, taking into account the special efforts that have been made with regard to investment, maintaining and creating jobs and adapting the periods that businesses are open, all with a view to mitigating the effects of seasonality.
- 1.2 Despite the strong resilience and quick recovery of tourism in times of crisis, the Committee deems it important to analyse and address the foreseeable challenges and opportunities facing nautical and maritime tourism, especially in the Mediterranean, because of its high relevance and substantial contribution to the European economy. Comparability with competing destinations should be given due consideration in the assessment process. Smarter legislation and policies are crucial, as is reducing red tape for SMEs.
- 1.3 More multi-destination routes in the region must be created and promoted, whilst joint/regional promotion measures among Member States need to be supported. The EESC proposes that Member States adopt strong marketing strategies for diversification and adaptation to customers' evolving preferences and tastes. However, the disparity in affordability for citizens that may exist for tourism services offered in this sector also needs to be assessed in the process.
- 1.4 In view of the high dependence of nautical and coastal tourism on marine ecosystems, it is important that Mediterranean countries increase regional cooperation to protect them. In this context, the Committee advocates establishing a pool of Western Mediterranean Member States and third countries to jointly address Blue Growth¹ and Blue and Green infrastructure to restore degraded ecosystems.
- 1.5 Construction and reclamation from the sea on the shallow continental shelf irreversibly destroy the underwater habitat. The Mediterranean continental shelf is limited and these marine zones need to be protected against such development. Compensatory measures and the creation of fiscal reserves should also be considered in the event that such development takes place.
- 1.6 The development of nautical and maritime tourism must be based on long-term sustainable development principles. This requires the development of an operative and measurable tool. The EESC recommends developing a harmonised sustainable indicator mechanism for the sector, especially for island states and regions which are highly dependent on coastal activities. The "European Tourism Indicators System" developed by the European Commission could be an excellent platform to achieve this.
- 1.7 The development of a sustainable indicator mechanism also requires the compilation of precise economic data. Tourism is a very complex industry that involves a diverse set of relationships between many different stakeholders. For this purpose, relative economic data collection instruments could be developed by extrapolating from the satellite account model.

¹ EU Communication - Blue Growth, COM(2012) 494 final.

- 1.8 The impact of climate change on the marine environment calls for dialogue on innovative solutions. Specific measures for vulnerable territories must be prioritised. The Committee draws attention to the recent Commission communication on international ocean governance and the 14 action package therein². The Seventh EU Environment Action Programme to 2020 and the EU climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives focus on infrastructure sectors like energy and transport and on specific aspects linked to coastal and maritime tourism. In addition, the European Investment Bank will be providing SMEs with funding for investment in tourism and/or in convergence regions.
- 1.9 Waste management is a matter of significant concern in nautical and maritime tourism, with tourism being a significant generator of waste itself. WWF estimates that over 80% of marine pollution comes from land-based activities. The problem is further compounded by marine littering. This calls for innovative measures that can mitigate the problems linked to waste, in addition to coordinated, effective enforcement of regulations. The Committee calls for harmonised implementation of international conventions so as to promote capacity building in third countries.
- 1.10 In view of growth prospects in the sector, the entire waste management chain (from collection to disposal) constitutes a major challenge, especially in confined areas such as islands. In this context, the EESC also recommends setting up a "nature heritage coalition" involving islands and coastal areas and key environment players such as foundations and international organisations, to turn European islands and coastal areas into leaders in global clean environment measures fostered by integrated approaches to tourism.
- 1.11 Investing in people is a prerequisite for sustainable and competitive growth. The sector is however not attracting enough skilled personnel, mainly because it lacks attractiveness in terms of career progression and long-term employment. The Committee recommends that a strategic action plan be specifically devised to attract and retain a steady stream of skilled workers interested in long-term employment in the sector. The action plan must make concrete proposals based on a scientific and practical approach, so as to increase the industry's attractiveness.

2. **General remarks**

- 2.1 The Maltese Presidency asked the EESC to issue an exploratory opinion on "Nautical and maritime tourism diversification strategies" in the broader context of innovative strategies for the development of a more competitive environment in Europe, with a particular focus on the Mediterranean region.
- 2.2 Tourism is a powerful global industry with great potential for employment and economic development, as recognised by Article 195 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. In 2014, the tourism sector contributed more than EUR 1.6 trillion, amounting to almost 10% of total EU GDP, and its direct, indirect, and induced impacts supported 25 million jobs in

² JOIN(2016) 49 final and https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/ocean-governance_en.

the EU³. The maritime sub-sector of tourism was identified as one of the priority areas for the Maltese EU Presidency. Developing relevant tourism products and maritime services could contribute to growth potential in the EU's coastal and insular areas. It is thus necessary to identify current trends and forecasts to provide a clearer picture of innovative opportunities in line with the specific nature of nautical and maritime tourism.

2.3 Nautical and maritime tourism is the most important subsector of tourism as well as the largest maritime activity in Europe. It employs almost 3.2 million people, generating a total of EUR 183 billion in gross value added⁴, and has potential for the creation of jobs and sustainable "blue growth". In order to promote Europe as the leading nautical destination in the world, European island and coastal tourism infrastructure must offer adequate and innovative services to users, including accessibility, while ensuring sustainable development for local communities. "Inland" nautical tourism which takes place across a number of Member States on lakes, rivers, etc., also forms part of this sector and needs to be factored in the review process. This sector also involves a major shipbuilding industry for leisure boats and cruise ships, where Europe has a prominent place in the world economy.

3. **The EESC's proposals for new paradigms in tourism policy**

3.1 Over the years, the Committee has adopted opinions on tourism policy in general and island and coastal tourism in particular. It has suggested developing life-long learning programmes specifically for island staff in the tourism sector and has proposed that an inter-regional school, based on a concept similar to an "Erasmus for students and workers in the Tourism sector", be set up on a strategically placed island.

3.2 The EESC considers that the EU's definition of islands is inappropriate and should be revised to take into account the new realities of an enlarged European Union which includes island Member States. With a view to promoting Europe as a key tourist destination at global level, it also recommends developing macro-regional cooperation (e.g. the Adriatic and Ionian Strategy, the Baltic Sea Strategy, and the Danube Strategy), to solve problems such as accessibility. This calls for high-quality territorial continuity operating from the islands to the continent.

3.3 Climate change calls for decisive adaptation measures for islands' climate resilience in all areas of their economies. The EESC has recommended introducing an "*Island Change Test*" addressing issues such as energy and transport (infrastructure and accessibility), the rise in sea levels, the deterioration in biodiversity and other important matters.

3.4 Island economies have become too dependent on mostly seasonal tourism, and diversification is therefore required. The Committee has emphasised that seeing the blue economy as an inexhaustible source of unexploited resources, and that insistently invoking blue growth as a panacea for the problems Europe's economy faces might increase the various stresses already

³ WTTC, Travel & Tourism economic impact, 2015.EU.

⁴ European Commission "Study in support of policy measures for maritime and coastal tourism at EU level, 2013:
https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/docs/body/study-maritime-and-coastal-tourism_en.pdf.

placed on the EU's coasts and seas. Therefore, long term sustainability must remain an overarching principle when measures are drawn up and implemented.

3.5 The Commission communication on "A European strategy for more growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism" adopted in 2014⁵ addresses current governance shortcomings and creates a framework for cooperation among public authorities and public-private partnerships, including through territorial clustering and integrated strategies. In light of the specificities of each sea basin, the communication proposes 14 concrete actions, addressing business investment, high seasonality, product diversification and innovation, connectivity, accessibility, improved infrastructure, skills development and marine environment protection. The implementation of the action plan is ongoing⁶.

4. **The EESC's proposals for nautical and maritime tourism diversification strategies**

4.1 Cross-sector environmental approach

4.1.1 Much has been done over the years to draw high level decision-makers and stakeholders' attention to the link between ocean and climate. This has led to oceans being included in the 2015 Paris Agreement and to the special Report on oceans by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These efforts call for support for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, including strengthening the technical capacities of Member States to develop technology pathways for a low-emission future.

Maritime transport is responsible for about 2.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The EU is calling for a global approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from international shipping, but shipping emissions are predicted to increase significantly by 2050. According to the 2nd International Maritime Organisation (IMO) greenhouse gas study, ships' energy consumption and CO₂ emissions could be reduced by up to 75% by applying operational measures and implementing existing technologies. Many of these measures are cost-effective and offer net benefits, as any operational or investment costs are paid back in the form of reduced fuel bills. Such reductions can be achieved by implementing new innovative technologies.

4.1.2 The Mediterranean is one of the most important regions in the world in terms of its outstanding biodiversity features, but one which is more vulnerable than others to climate change. Large-scale coastal tourism is one of the main forces behind ecological loss in the region. However, the Mediterranean also embraces high natural value which makes it critically important for safeguarding biodiversity. In this regard, regional cooperation for the protection of marine ecosystems is imperative. The European Union's LIFE+ funding programme supports the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and offers scope for financing innovative coastal and marine tourism projects.

⁵ COM(2014) 86 final.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/coastal_tourism_en.

- 4.1.3 Waste management is a major concern for the sector, especially on islands, which are highly seasonal. Most islands may find it difficult to cope with the high visitor numbers in peak periods, which calls for huge investment for the provision of adequate water or waste treatment plants. The conclusion of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides a globally recognised framework for action to combat threats to natural heritage, from dealing with marine litter and micro-plastics to the sustained reduction and abolition of single-use plastic bags.
- 4.1.4 Various studies and reports underline that "going green" makes sound business sense for European coastal tourism. The EU needs to incentivise Member States to step up their efforts to adopt green tourism practices and introduce green programmes that mitigate the effects of climate change. This should be supported by the promotion of eco-tourism as a segment supporting nautical tourism.
- 4.1.5 These challenges make it more important for the development of the nautical and maritime tourism to follow sustainable development principles. Sustainability, however, needs to be based on an operative and measurable model that establishes a system of indicators to monitor and keep track of maritime tourism activities and developments, especially for island States and regions. Destinations also need to look at establishing carrying-capacity thresholds, which, if exceeded, will give rise to a number of issues that will adversely affect this sector and its long term sustainability. These thresholds are in particular:
- Deterioration in and loss of ecological resources;
 - Pressures on the environment and physical infrastructure;
 - Conflict between tourists and locals resulting in loss of local hospitality;
 - Visitor dissatisfaction.
- 4.1.6 The "European Tourism Indicators System" developed by the European Commission in 2013 and revised in 2016⁷ is a voluntary management tool which identifies a set of core indicators to help destinations to monitor and measure their sustainable tourism performance.
- 4.1.7 In this regard, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) is a most valuable source, providing information, statistics and advice, which are vital to the process of establishing sustainability principles.
- 4.1.8 Reference should also be made to the EESC opinion on "Smart Islands", particularly in terms of the adoption of best practices.
- 4.1.9 The "Tracking European Operations for Maritime EcoSystems" project, under the umbrella of ERA-LEARN 2020 (support action - CSA) and funded by Horizon 2020, can serve as another valuable resource in reaching this objective.
- 4.1.10 Many organisations and institutions have contributed to the process of environmental protection, such as the WWF, Ocean & Climate Platform, the Conference of Peripheral

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http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators_en.

Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR), Greenpeace and various UN structures, which have worked with various EU structures and in enhanced cooperation between governments and public and private stakeholders. This process need to be sustained if we are to follow the path of success.

- 4.1.11 Healthy marine ecosystems and preserved coastal/insular areas contribute in many ways to sustainable growth and job creation. Tourism and agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry are key sectors with a significant impact on and relevance for mainstreaming biodiversity. Sustainable food production and food security are other related issues that need special attention. Sectoral policies that contribute to preserving biodiversity must be developed within an integrated framework. On the issue of marine ecosystems the EESC draws attention to the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSP)⁸ as well as to the 1995 Barcelona Convention⁹.
- 4.1.12 Marine pollution often comes from untreated waste water and agriculture, but threats to marine ecosystems also include commercial overfishing, oil spills and other hazardous substances as well as the introduction of non-native species. The mismanagement of ballast water can also have a considerable effect on the environment¹⁰. Marine ecosystems are a major source of biodiversity and the European Union is taking a number of steps to achieve a healthy marine environment to make ecosystems more resilient to climate change in European marine waters by 2020. This calls for close working cooperation between all stakeholders.
- 4.1.13 In this context, the choice of implementing instruments is of strategic importance in order to make sure that all economic sectors benefit from new opportunities generated by healthy ecosystems. At the same time, transparency, proper consultation and accountability are essential in order for tourism to come under the general concept of good governance. As stated by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹¹, resource efficiency and the circular economy are prerequisites for achieving progress and sustainability in this field.
- 4.1.14 Awareness-raising policies must be developed to improve compliance, using incentives for clean nautical and maritime tourism activities (including related industries such as yachting, fisheries, food supply, etc.). In this context, comprehensive cross-sector training programmes must be developed to pursue complex sustainable goals, while a network of relevant tourism areas would allow for the exchange of data and good practice.
- 4.1.15 Europe has to put its natural resources to good use and promote its top locations where nature and spatial planning in coastal and maritime areas are in harmony with one another. Since coastal areas are of particular strategic environmental, economic and social importance, steps to tackle problems in these areas need to be part of an integrated sustainable development policy, where spatial planning, the balance between uses of renewable energies and other coastal

⁸ Directive 2014/89/EU of 23 July 2014, see also https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime_spatial_planning_en.

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/international-cooperation/regional-sea-conventions/barcelona-convention/index_en.htm.

¹⁰ At present there is no direct EU law on ballast water, although Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, recognises the BWM Convention as one of the possible management measures for invasive species of concern.

¹¹ Council document 13398/16 (<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13398-2016-INIT/en/pdf>).

activities and urban planning rules take on particular importance¹². It is necessary to ensure the best possible implementation of the MSP Directive by Member States. Since this Directive does not deal with coastal areas, it is useful to refer again to the Barcelona Convention, which conveniently has a protocol on coastal management.

4.2 Long-term advantages of an integrated, cross-sectoral approach

4.2.1 Harmonisation of legal requirements

4.2.1.1 The current state of play needs to be properly assessed following the 18 January 2016 deadline for EU Member States to amend their national legislation and transpose Directive 94/25/EC on recreational craft, as amended by Directive 2003/44/EC. This directive was enacted to promote the sustainable development of the sector and decrease the number of boat accidents at sea through the introduction of standard requirements on user safety as well as exhaust and noise emissions.

4.2.1.2 This European legal framework was intended to remove disparities among Member States which risk hindering intra-EU movement. This mandatory harmonisation process has brought about a number of challenges which need to be identified and analysed urgently, as there is clearly still no uniformity at European Union level in terms of requirements. There is a lack of coordination and uniformity, as illustrated by the different national training schemes for skippers¹³. If not effectively and expediently managed, the interim transposition process can be counter-productive and potentially affect the competitiveness of the recreational boating industry, with implications which are contrary to the objectives set for nautical and maritime tourism.

4.2.2 Competitiveness

4.2.2.1 In recent years, various sub-sectors of this industry have been subject to demand volatility and fluctuations in the tourism industry at large which has also been affected by the economic climate prevailing in the source countries. The aftermath of recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the subsequent heightening of other terrorism threats will no doubt impact tourism. However, over the years tourism has proved to be very resilient, even in very challenging times, as illustrated by the quick recovery following the 2008-2009 economic crisis and subsequent multiple crises.

4.2.2.2 High-quality tourism products and services are becoming increasingly important and we must be innovative, while investment must be guaranteed. We need to look at product diversification and improvement across the entire value chain. This is an avenue that can give a significant boost to nautical and maritime tourism and to the attractiveness of the potential destinations. This will also enable us to adapt to changing consumer patterns and to demographic change, which is influencing travel patterns.

¹² [OJ C 451, 16.12.2014, p. 64.](#)

¹³ See also [OJ C 389, 21.10.2016, p. 93.](#)

4.2.2.3 Customers are becoming increasingly adventurous and are more prepared to participate in new travel modes and experiences. The Commission's recent EUR 1.5 million call for the creation of nautical routes that promote nautical tourism is a step in the right direction. This initiative will help to promote linkages to other economic sectors and attract visitors with special interests such as gastronomy, culture and leisure activities.

4.2.2.4 Within the framework of its competences, the Commission carries out actions to support the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector that can also benefit the development of nautical and maritime tourism.

4.2.2.5 One such action is the COSME programme, which, over the past six years, has supported the development and promotion of transnational thematic tourism products, in areas such as maritime tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomy, sports and wellness¹⁴. The EDEN initiative also gives visibility to non-traditional destinations which have demonstrated excellence in sustainable tourism development¹⁵. The 2010 edition focused on coastal, riverside and lake destinations, promoting innovative approaches towards their aquatic tourism offer.

4.2.2.6 Regions can also tap into the European Structural and Investment Funds¹⁶ when it comes to investment for the modernisation of coastal areas, marinas and ports, and for the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage in coastal areas, if they contribute to the relevant thematic objectives and are part of a territorial strategy. The Commission has also published a guide¹⁷ providing a comprehensive overview of EU funding opportunities for the tourism sector. Coastal and maritime tourism stakeholders can apply for relevant funds under these different programmes.

4.2.2.7 The linkage and promotion of these services can be achieved through the clustering of products and services that can enhance visitors' experience, i.e. by directing them to a comprehensive choice of preferred products and services that will specifically appeal to them. The concept of clustering is becoming increasingly popular in tourism, involving the offering of specialised tourist products and services. Targeted marketing allows for the use of every means, especially digital methods, to reach out directly to all potential visitors, with a view to creating a direct connection between potential visitors and the destination.

4.2.3 Job creation potential of nautical and maritime tourism

Investing in people is a prerequisite for sustainable and competitive growth. Achieving this goal requires strategic change management in terms of skills development opportunities, industry-wide cooperation and commitment and leadership by relevant stakeholders. This is a process that requires bringing together key stakeholders through social and civil dialogue, in an effort to

14 https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/transnational-products_en.

15 https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/eden/about/themes_en.

16 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_tourism.pdf.

17 http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8496.

set a common strategy to address a challenge that is faced by most EU Member States. This can also serve as a basis for creating new job prospects, especially for young people, for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector, and for safeguarding seafarers' rights in relation to their conditions of employment at sea and the benefit of an enhanced compliance regime.

4.2.3.1 In its opinion on growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism¹⁸, the EESC said that the proposed move to carry out a survey of training needs and set up a "blue jobs" section in the EURES Portal was important. However, it is also essential for the Commission to publicise this extensively and raise awareness in Member States about the need to take on board the survey's outcome in their domestic training policies. The training should be aimed at employees as well as employers, but also at tourism institutions. Increased awareness about the importance of tourism, European heritage and the environment should also be included in the training. This must feature in compulsory education so that young people are educated about this from an early age.

4.2.3.2 The Commission has undertaken many initiatives to develop skills in tourism that will also benefit blue jobs, such as the "New Skills Agenda"¹⁹. This important policy document contains a "blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills", which identifies tourism as one of the six pilot sectors to pursue specific actions based on an industry-led approach. In this connection, a call for proposals was published at the end of January 2017 under the Erasmus+ fund with a budget of EUR 4 million. The fund will support the creation of a platform of sectoral key stakeholders (including industry and education providers) who will propose actions and recommendations for the next 5/10 years. The platform will analyse major trends and skills needs in the sector, develop concrete actions to satisfy short- and medium-term skills needs, revise occupational profiles, update new curricula, promote the attractiveness of the sector, and encourage mobility for students and jobseekers.

4.2.3.3 A call for tender with a budget of EUR 800 000 will also be published in March 2017 under COSME, to support actions promoting the image of tourism careers. The actions will include awareness-raising campaigns on existing initiatives and tools for skills development in tourism, and on the image of tourism careers, through the provision of support materials, interviews and webinars presenting positive aspects of tourism careers (i.e. that they are international, trendy, dynamic). The actions will target tourism businesses (including SMEs) and start-ups, as well as students and jobseekers.

4.2.4 Statistical Economic Data

4.2.4.1 The nautical and maritime tourism industry is very complex and involves a diverse set of relationships between many different stakeholders. The various economic activities that together make up this industry vary considerably. Statistical information regarding maritime and coastal tourism in the Member States is not always readily available and the method of collection may vary from one country to another. This may produce inconsistent data and therefore present

¹⁸ [OJ C 451, 16.12.2014, p. 64.](#)

¹⁹ [http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223.](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223)

figures which may not give precise results. In view of the sector's importance for the European economy, consistent and precise data are an absolute must. This will also help everyone in the sector to precisely understand and ascertain the dynamics of the nautical industry and how this influences the EU's economic performance. The tourism satellite account²⁰ methodology can provide the sector with the necessary tool. The economic data derived through this system can be combined with the collection of other important data which together can constitute the "sustainable indicator mechanism". A number of Member States are already familiar with the tool and this will facilitate the process.

Brussels, 30 March 2017.

George DASSIS

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee

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The Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) developed by the UNWTO is a standard statistical framework and the main tool for the economic measurement of tourism. The Recommended Methodological Framework 2008 (also known as the TSA: RMF 2008) provides the updated common conceptual framework for constructing a TSA.