



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**INT/740**  
**Growth and Jobs in**  
**Coastal and Maritime**  
**Tourism**

Brussels, 9 July 2014

**OPINION**

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism**

COM(2014) 86 final

---

Rapporteur: **Mr Barros Vale**

---

On 7 March 2014 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism*  
COM(2014) 86 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 23 June 2014.

At its 500th plenary session, held on 9 and 10 July 2014 (meeting of 9 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 189 votes in favour, with 6 abstentions.

\*

\* \*

## **1. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes this communication, as it did the previous communications, of 2010 and 2012, since it deems initiatives which might contribute to the development of maritime and coastal tourism to be important.
- 1.2 Conscious of the limits imposed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EESC supports the measures set out in the Commission's communication. However, it would still like to submit some recommendations and sound a few warnings for the purposes of contributing to the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of coastal and maritime tourism, as advocated in the Europe 2020 strategy.
- 1.3 Europe has to turn 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 use of renewable energies and other coastal activities and urban planning rules take on particular importance. The recent and future, sometimes destructive, impact of climate change on coastal areas with retreating coastlines should not be underestimated as it involves lengthy, extensive adaptation.

- 1.4 As it has advocated in the past, the EESC reiterates the idea of setting up a European tourism agency, in which all the interested parties participate, such as tourism confederations, tourist regions, tourism authorities and trade unions in the sector. The creation of such a body could be a driving force for promoting Europe to the world.
- 1.5 It may now be time to look at creating a proper joint policy for tourism, which, while safeguarding national autonomy, takes an overall view of the sector, creating synergies and coordinating the policies of each Member State. Every year fragmented ideas emerge which go no further because of the lack of coordination and of a joint tourism strategy which can promote a European brand of conventional and non-conventional tourist destinations, historic heritage and gastronomy while, at the same time, dealing with any negative publicity that may from time to time occur.
- 1.6 The growth of mass tourism, greatly encouraged by the emergence of low-cost airlines, must be exploited, creating or promoting transport networks that link areas served by airports with other, more remote areas, giving continuity to the region by including very remote areas in tourist circuits, making them attractive to tourists, so that visits to urban and coastal destinations can be combined in the same trip. It is essential for information on existing links to be available in one place to encourage mobility. The EESC stresses the urgent need for the legislation on granting visas to be revised, making it easier for non-European tourists to travel, particularly those from China and other emerging markets.
- 1.7 Remote areas, particularly in the north of Europe, which have excellent environmental conditions, deserve to be given special attention, facilitating transport and providing infrastructure, communications and wi-fi networks that attract tourism and help to keep communities going.
- 1.8 There is an urgent need for proper management of tourist ports because of the lack of information on marinas and how ports are linked, which makes access difficult for yachts and cruise ships. The fact that ports are not properly managed is a hindrance to the development of tourism and the movement of persons and goods. The Commission could approach this issue from the angle of single market and free movement policies, working on removing the current shortcomings.
- 1.9 The exponential increase in cruise holidays has been creating new situations whose impact has yet to be studied properly. Although the fact that more tourists are visiting certain ports is important for the development of coastal areas, it is essential to minimise the harmful impact that these peak flows of visitors can cause in the areas visited. Proper preparation is necessary to deal with the risks of water and air pollution from the fuel used by large cruise ships and the environmental risks arising from thousands of people visiting tourist destinations. Efforts are also needed to coordinate information on the ports of call of these ships with local tourism management, in order to avoid a flood of tourists from cruise ships arriving at the same time as others who could organise their visits at different times of day.

- 1.10 The proposed move to carry out a survey of training needs and set up a "blue jobs" section in the EURES Portal is an important one; 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 initiatives to be supported, which should be aimed not only at the staff of companies and institutions in the area of tourism but also at employers in the sector, must include, in addition to topics that help enhance the quality of the tourist service, topics that help promote Europe as a holiday destination. It should be emphasised that raising awareness of the importance of tourism, European heritage and the environment must start in compulsory education so that young people are educated in this from an early age.
- 1.11 Furthermore, with regard to the issue of cruise holidays, Europe must keep a careful eye on cruise companies' employment policies. European youth employment can and must be protected in a growing sector that has great employment potential.
- 1.12 The EESC would reiterate the importance of certain provisions which could help meet the challenges facing the tourism sector, and coastal and maritime tourism in particular, such as:
- the promotion of a European platform with integrated information on road, rail, maritime and air links - the mobility difficulties associated with tourist flows block the development of very remote regions with high potential for tourism, especially in the north of Europe, because of lack of information on available transport, difficulties in coordinating transport or even an absence of transport;
  - the promotion of nature tourism and sustainable tourism, social tourism, maritime, cultural and sport tourism, business trips, "well-being" and therapy tourism, history tourism, religious tourism and food tourism;
  - incentives for tourism for senior citizens and people with disabilities, reduced mobility or special needs;
  - recognition of Europe's cultural legacy and its unique heritage which distinguishes us from other regions, protecting this heritage and promoting it as a tourist destination of excellence;
  - an emphasis on promoting the safety which Europe can offer visitors when they are travelling and during their stay, and in relation to water quality and food safety, medical, pharmaceutical and hospital care, personal safety and respect for people and their fundamental rights.
- 1.13 The EESC is in favour of a study on the preferences of tourists who visit or intend to visit Europe, showing what they did or did not like, the reasons why they would return or which prevent them from doing so, and why they might prefer non-European destinations. The study, which should be disseminated by the various tourist operators, ports and marinas, tourist associations and authorities, governments and European authorities, would tell us

about the behaviour and characteristics of tourists, in order to support decision-making and shape joint strategies for the development of the sector.

- 1.14 The EESC would also ask that, as a part of the debate on tourism and measures to be taken, a link be made between maritime and coastal tourism and river tourism, taking advantage of what rivers and estuaries have to offer, to complement coastal areas' activities. Taking advantage of the possibilities offered by river areas would make it possible to develop new products such as gastronomic cruises, rural tourism and eco-tourism, while estuary areas offer great landscape and educational value and are good for bird-watching and observing the bio-diversity which is the hallmark of such areas.

## 2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 This communication, following that of 2010<sup>1</sup>, in which a strategy for sustainable coastal and maritime tourism was announced, and that of 2012 on "Blue Growth opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth"<sup>2</sup>, tackles one of the five blue economy sectors identified for priority intervention: coastal and maritime tourism.

- 2.2 This sector was already identified as a key value chain likely to generate sustainable growth and jobs. Coastal and maritime tourism is the biggest maritime activity in Europe, employing nearly 3.2 million people, of whom nearly half are young people. Generating 183 thousand million euros of gross added value, the sector is mostly made up of micro businesses and SMEs, and is where more than a third of all Europe's tourism-related businesses operate.

- 2.3 The communication aims to identify the challenges facing the sector, namely: stimulating performance and competitiveness by improving knowledge, addressing demand volatility and overcoming sector fragmentation; promoting skills and innovation; strengthening sustainability by addressing environmental pressures, promoting an innovative, sustainable and high-quality offer and seeing opportunities in geographical constraints such as insularity and remoteness.

- 2.4 It also broaches issues relating to the use of EU funding and the integration of EU policies impacting on coastal and maritime tourism.

## 3. **General comments**

- 3.1 Blue growth, incorporating traditional sectors and developing and emerging sectors, is a complex, ambitious challenge which has to be tackled using an integrated approach. In the development of coastal areas the interests of the various sectors involved should be taken into account, not forgetting environmental issues, with particular attention paid to spatial and

---

<sup>1</sup> COM(2010) 352 final – EESC opinion: [OJ C 376, 22.12.2011, p. 44.](#)

<sup>2</sup> COM(2012) 494 final – EESC opinion: [OJ C 161, 6.6.2013, p. 87.](#)

maritime planning aspects, which determine the tourist products on offer. The cross-sectoral approach needed for this issue should be noted, as without safeguarding of land use and environmental protection neither coastal nor any other kind of tourism can be developed. The importance of using renewable energies is clear and should be intensively promoted. However, particular attention needs to be paid to the location of infrastructure so as not to exclude the development of maritime tourist activities. The siting of nuclear energy plants in tourist areas should be avoided.

A dynamic balance has to be struck in coastal areas, since the weather and human activity are sources of constant change. Natural resources provide the foundations for the economies and, together with innovation, should be viewed as pillars for smart, socially inclusive growth.

- 3.2 The main problems encountered in tourism have persisted over the years: the need to overcome the challenges of seasonal fluctuations, precarious, low-skill employment (especially among young people), a lack of new, innovative products, and difficulties in accessing finance, particularly for micro-businesses and SMEs. It is therefore vital to establish a European political framework for developing tourism, a genuine European tourism policy, which steers joint development strategies while respecting Member States' freedom to develop their own domestic policies.
- 3.3 Countering seasonal fluctuations in coastal and maritime tourism must entail offering new products to attract new consumers, mainly in the low season. Developing new products for tourism for senior citizens or the disadvantaged, harnessing the potential of nautical tourism, be it leisure boating (sailing, motor boating), nautical sports (dinghy sailing, windsurfing, kite-surfing, surfing, bodyboarding, rowing, canoeing, water skiing, power boating, sports fishing, underwater hunting and diving, including wreck diving) or boat trips and cruises, and developing spa-, golf- or nature-related tourism could be a possible way of increasing the number of holidaymakers in low season, helping to enable the population to stay permanently in regions dependent on tourism. Supporting the development, particularly in remote areas, of new tourism-focused industries that use products coming from coastal areas, along with universal access to broadband networks, could help counter seasonal fluctuations and attract young people to these areas.
- 3.4 Some of these less traditional, nautical activities are already amply developed by local sports clubs whose know-how can be turned to good use. Support for nautical tourism should be made concrete and should be regulated, creating new infrastructures and modernising existing infrastructure, as well as providing new opportunities to allow such activities to be made available, for they are considerably attractive to non-traditional sections of the public.

Maritime and coastal tourism is interlinked in a number of places with river tourism. The close links between the two should not be overlooked, and it is recommended that joint development strategies be drawn up. Pleasure boating is, from this point of view, an activity

which should be given a boost, with the development of new products which combine the potential of sea and river activities.

- 3.5 Tourism cannot be seen in isolation, but rather as a sector affected by a variety of EU policies, especially transport, employment, education, environment, innovation, safety and consumer policies, inter alia. These problems should be tackled using an integrated approach, since the measures flowing from the various policies directly influence the performance of the sector.
- 3.6 Since it has no powers to intervene directly in tourism, the Commission can remedy some of the problems through measures which do fall within its remit as regards promotion of the single market, namely in relation to the free movement of people and goods, and goals relating to the creation of the single market, dealing with issues that go beyond the sphere of tourism and affect other areas where action would not only be possible, but also desirable.

#### 4. **Specific comments**

- 4.1 Information about the tourism sector is quite fragmented, making studies and assessments difficult, because there is either a lack of data or a lack of specific indicators allowing comparisons to be drawn. The EESC welcomes the intention to remedy this shortcoming but points out that, since the 2010 communication when this problem was identified, very little progress has been made on this front.
- 4.2 The Commission's efforts to promote the high quality tourism which Europe can offer can help mitigate seasonal fluctuations and the associated social and economic problems. Europe is facing competition from new destinations in emerging countries with attractive low prices but not the same safety levels or cultural wealth. Promoting Europe as a tourist destination should be based on the high quality which singles it out and on Europe's greatest assets: a unique cultural heritage, safety, the wide range of services, respect for people's rights, access facilities for people with disabilities and special needs and the availability of telecommunications and wi-fi networks. The importance of Europe's cultural heritage needs to be recognised, and preserving it is key to the development of sustainable, inclusive tourism.
- 4.3 Special attention also has to be paid to tourism for senior citizens. At a time when populations are ageing throughout the world, there should be special focus on tourism related to health and to cultural and natural heritage when devising strategies for the sector. Lastly, it is tourists over 50 who spend the most and it is senior citizens who have more time to travel and who prefer to do so in the low season.
- 4.4 The cruise market has grown considerably. Nevertheless, the real impact of port calls on coastal activities is tiny, since such stops are brief and local businesses are not well advertised. Promoting dialogue between cruise operators, ports and coastal tourism stakeholders as proposed in the communication is important, and must take place in the context of development of transnational and inter-regional partnerships, networks, clusters

and strategies with smart specialisation offsetting the current fragmentation in the sector. It is genuinely effective to operate in networks, and tourism must make use of this possibility. Such support could be promoted as part of the activities of the European tourist agency proposed above, which would serve as a platform for wide-ranging debate on the problems of the sector and as a basis for networks and cooperation.

- 4.5 The training of skilled staff is vital for sustainable and inclusive growth. The tourism sector is facing particular difficulties in finding qualified workers, since it employs a large number of young people in seasonal work and precarious jobs, with few opportunities for career advancement. The EESC welcomes the creation of the "blue jobs" section on the EURES portal and the survey on training needs in the tourism sector. It recommends that the Member States be asked to take on board the survey's results when promoting training opportunities funded by the European Social Fund and other, private sources, and that incentives be given for existing schools to work together in networks and for projects linked to the tourism sector under the Erasmus + programme. Training for employers in the sector should be included which acquaints them with good management practices that they can adopt, keeps them up to date with the legislation in force and the use of information technologies and makes them aware of the environment and specific issues of the tourist sector.
- 4.6 As regards the problem of Member States requiring different competences for professional yacht skippers, the EESC feels that the Commission is not ambitious enough in its proposals. Although there is no doubt that the Commission's powers are limited in the area of tourism, the same is not true when it comes to the free movement of people and the creation of the single market, which are also concerned by this issue.
- 4.7 Incentives should be given to use innovative management systems through the *ICT and Tourism Business* initiative portal. It is to be noted that this portal, promoted by the Commission, like many other tourism-related sites such as the Virtual Tourism Observatory, Tourism Link Platform and eCalypso Platform, has not been translated into every language, which could constitute an obstacle or disincentive to their use by users from some countries.
- 4.8 The sustainability of coastal and maritime tourism has to be based on full respect for the environment, viewing land and sea areas as being interconnected. Stepping up sustainability by means of the proposed measures is most important for the development of new products, including Europe's wealth of heritage and respect for the environment. Again it is clear that measures in other areas such as the environment, sea and transport are connected with tourism; therefore, in its initiatives, the Commission should pay particular attention to consequences for the tourism sector.
- 4.9 The EESC welcomes the inclusion of tourism in the specific objectives of the 2014-2020 COSME programme, seeing this as a major opportunity for developing the sector by supporting the promotion of international cooperation projects and the adoption of sustainable tourist development models promoted by European Destinations of Excellence. The



preparation of an on-line guide with the main funding opportunities also warrants the EESC's support, in view of the potential cross-cutting nature of tourism initiatives. Once again, it should be noted that language barriers may constitute an obstacle to consultation and interpretation of the on-line guide.

Brussels, 9 July 2014.

The President  
of the  
Economic and Social Committee

Henri Malosse

---