

COTER-009

Brussels, 23 October 2002

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 10 October 2002

on the

**Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament,
the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions –**

Working together for the future of European tourism

and the

**Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament,
the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions –**

Follow-up of the European Council of 21 September:

The situation in the European tourism sector

(COM(2001) 665 final and COM(2001) 668 final)

Rapporteur: **Mr Alfonso Andria** (I, EPP)

President of the province of Salerno

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Working together for the future of European tourism

(COM(2001) 665 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Follow-up of the European Council of 21 September: the situation in the European tourism sector

(COM(2001) 668 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by the Commission on 15 November 2001 to consult the Committee on this subject, in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by its Bureau on 6 February 2002 to instruct the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy to draw up the relevant opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO its previous opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Enhancing Tourism's Potential for Employment (COM(1999) 205 final) (CdR 291/1999 fin);¹

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion adopted by its Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy on 24 June 2002 (CdR 99/2002 rev. 1) (rapporteur: **Mr Andria**, President of the province of Salerno - I, EPP);

WHEREAS the November 1997 European conference on tourism and employment held in Luxembourg (4-5.11.1997), the Luxembourg European Council on employment (21-22.11.1997) and the conclusions of the Tourism Ministers' Council meeting on 26 November 1997 provided a broad and structured policy and planning platform, giving priority to the benefits arising from the balanced and sustainable development of European tourism;

WHEREAS in 1998 the Commission established a high level group responsible for analysing the link between tourism and employment and, on the basis of the conclusions of this working group (European Tourism - New partnerships for employment: Conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Group on Tourism and Employment, European Commission), the Commission published the Communication on Enhancing tourism's potential for employment (COM(1999) 205 final);

WHEREAS this Communication gave rise to the conclusions of the Council of 21 June 1999 calling on the Commission and the Member States to "cooperate closely in order to maximise the contribution which tourism may make to growth and employment", particularly with respect to four subjects:

1. *information*;
2. *training*;
3. *quality*;
4. *sustainability*.

WHEREAS since the Council meeting of 21 June 1999 on tourism and employment and on the basis of the reactions of the other European institutions², there has been a growing awareness of the need to improve the effectiveness of the dialogue between the various players concerned with growth trends in the tourism sector (Member States, professionals, civil society and European institutions);

WHEREAS the present Communication on Working together for the future of European tourism (*COM(2001) 665 final*) strengthens the resolve to implement the open coordination method among all operators concerned (Lisbon European Council), while also staying in line with the guidelines given by the White Paper on governance, and in essence calls for urgent attention to be given to four main issues:

1. *increasing the basic knowledge of the sector;*
2. *sharpening the competitiveness of companies working in the sector;*
3. *improving growth prospects relating to sustainable development;*
4. *contributing to job creation.*

WHEREAS the present Communication refers several times to the need to involve civil society, the tourism industry and the players present in the various European regions in the framing of a Community tourism policy, in order to define an interactive channel through which to exchange up-to-the-minute information on trends in tourism supply and demand, as well as on the current changes, not least in terms of problems that may be shared;

WHEREAS the same document underlines the urgent need for interinstitutional cooperation between the various tiers of local and regional administrative authorities and between them and the bodies/institutions of the European Union;

WHEREAS the involvement of the above-mentioned institutional and social players can no longer be put off owing to the unavoidable problems mentioned by **Helena Torres Marques** (MEP-P) among others at the meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism on 19 March;

WHEREAS the state of tourism in Europe (according to the European Commission report on Follow-up of the European Council of 21 September: the situation in the European tourism sector) has proved to be not as bad as initially expected after 11 September 2001, although new trends have emerged showing a different and more complex geographical spread of user profiles,

WHEREAS on the basis of the analyses contained in the European Commission's first progress report on economic and social cohesion, of 30 January 2002, in the context of development policies linked to the Structural Funds, from 2006 it will be necessary to give consideration to the impact in regions whose economies are based mainly on tourism, make an in-depth assessment of the impact of Community initiatives such as Leader, Interreg, Urban and Equal, and shape new strategies for intervention in local development systems with particular regard to Objective 1 regions;

WHEREAS AGENDA 21 aims to promote sustainable development and thus the definitive take-off of eco-tourism, with the full involvement of local and regional authorities;

WHEREAS in September of the 2002 International Year of Ecotourism, there will be a world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg;

WHEREAS the European Commission's communication lists five priorities for the future development of European tourism:

- information: to facilitate the exchange and dissemination of information, particularly through new technologies;
- training: to improve training in order to upgrade skills in the tourism industry;
- quality: to improve the quality of tourism products;
- sustainability: to promote environmental protection (finding innovative ways of

implementing Agenda 21);

- new technologies: controlling the impact and use of services based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the tourism sector;

adopted the present opinion unanimously at its 46th plenary session of 10 October 2002:

General comments

1. *"We have much more in common than we have to separate us"*

This principle quoted in the opening lines of the executive summary of the report drawn up by the World Tourism Organisation for the second meeting of the Travel and Tourism Recovery Committee (15 March 2002, ITB Berlin) – entitled "The impact of the September 11 attacks on tourism: The light at the end of the tunnel" – sums up the philosophy underpinning this document. There is a need for an awareness that tourism in Europe can lean on the added value generated by the common thread of a cultural identity that goes much deeper than is generally thought. For this reason, work must be done in the short and medium term on two main fronts:

a) giving priority to procedures aimed at gradually harmonising standards of supply, building on the many areas of fertile common ground (starting with the single currency);

b) further harmonising local, regional, national and Community policies in relation to the five main priorities mentioned above in the area of tourism: *information, training, quality, sustainability and new technologies*.

2. Following early analyses which pointed to much more serious consequences for the European tourist economy, the impact of 11 September has turned out to be in line with forecasts that envisaged that the first signs of a turnaround would be seen six months after the attack. Currently, as the WTO notes, tourism is making a clear recovery although the pattern of tourist flows has evidently changed. Intercontinental air traffic has suffered a serious downturn, while domestic tourism has to some extent helped to stem a decline which could in many ways have spelled disaster.
3. This redistribution of flows means that some sectors of the tourist industry have suffered more than others. Small tour operators, medium-scale sporting and cultural event organisers, domestic package-holiday companies, small airlines and other small operators have generally weathered the crisis better than others.
4. This would suggest that after 11 September, the global economy suffered a sudden slow-down, prompting a rethink of economic growth strategies at local level. In this context, regional development systems have been at an advantage but have not always turned it to account. There has been a shift from global to local level.
5. As stressed in the above-mentioned World Tourism Organisation report, there are signs of further recovery in the short-term. However, what lessons can be learned from the crisis? In the unspeakable event that it should happen again, what structural response to such difficult times can be planned? It should be noted that in general it was clear that there was no strategically coordinated response at European level: there was no common planned response to the immediate and complex crisis triggered by the attacks.

6. The Commission report states that "Several requests for policy action have been made by the European tourism industry. Above all, the European tourism industry emphasises the need to coordinate, more than ever before, the promotion of Europe in its overseas markets and has asked that the Commission play an active role in the promotion of Europe as a safe destination."
7. The report rightly concludes that efforts should focus mainly on the new cooperative approach, with measures that "aim at improving the integration of the concerns of all tourism stakeholders in Community policies and initiatives affecting tourism, and at promoting a better interface with the tourism industry and other parties involved."

Recommendations

1. The Committee of the Regions favours the open consultation and coordination method, but insists on the importance of transparency and democratic parliamentary scrutiny.

Regional and local authorities with their key role have once more proved to be the only unifying forces able to further the territorial cohesion policies implemented by the European Union. Agreement is not possible without participation. The governance of an area is effective only if it begins at grass-roots level. Even the most innovative instruments will not necessarily have a positive impact if they are passed down from on high. Conversely, when input and proposals are adopted at grass-roots level, they foster a culture of reciprocal dialogue and listening. Political federalism becomes administrative federalism and institutional, economic and social partnership.

This is how every tourism development policy should be viewed. There can be no genuine European tourism network without a careful process of monitoring and understanding the current situation. An all-encompassing plan putting the widely-felt need for tourist safety first involves surveying needs, assessing accommodation and leisure facilities, and evaluating transport systems.

The CoR remarks that in its communication (Annex 1, page 21), the Commission is concerned by the lack of progress made with local and regional authorities during the Working Groups on the five key areas of priority (highlighted on page 4 of this opinion) during their discussions. The CoR encourages the European Commission and the Member States, in the spirit of Governance, to develop effective working practices that engage local and regional government to ensure that policies are developed in the future that complement and add value to that of tourism activity at the grass-root level.

2. The Committee of the Regions recommends promoting the responsibility of public and private players.

Working from the grass-roots calls for a completely new mindset, transforming the traditional relationship between public and private sectors. The link between them is no longer one of subordination, instead, they are partners in a development plan organised in terms of equality, on the basis of a broader notion of citizenship. Rather than being mere bystanders to government action in their area, citizens can now play a part in local government in the context of institutional measures promoted by regional and local authorities.

The synergy this generates makes the tourism industry highly competitive. Individual companies (or individual cartels) are no longer alone in seeking the most effective way to make a profit, as the local system to which they belong seeks the path best suited to dealing with the market. This type of approach - defined by some academics as the development of geo-communities - can also be used to manage the transition from unruly, uncontrolled globalisation to regulated and

sustainable globalisation.

Sustainable development comes from knowledge of the region and its potential. The main precondition for developing and maintaining ecotourism is that of turning local potential to account.

3. The Committee of the Regions highlights the priorities for developing and promoting European tourism on the world market.

Before launching any product onto the market, it is first a good idea to focus on the perception of any product's identity from the point of view of the customer. In the field of tourism, the perception of a tourism product should surpass any will to promote tourism supply around any administrative or regional boundary.

Putting the traveller, the tourist, at the centre of any draft legislation is essential. Even the most advanced marketing theories point to the need to "profile" supply on the basis of the needs of the potential user, in order to create genuine user communities that interact with the product designed for them. Rather than focusing on any single EU product, the CoR believes that there is an ideal opportunity for the European Commission to add value to work at local and regional level by making the most of the benefits offered by IT systems. By developing a single harmonised IT network over the Internet, providers and tourists would be better placed to devise or guide their way through an enormous mass of data that is currently available. The Commission, without trying to develop an EU product, could assist in developing a system that would help bring providers and tourists together more effectively.

In cooperation with local and regional authorities and the tourism sector, the European Commission should conduct measures, under the VIth R&D framework programme, to speed up the introduction of new technologies in the management and information systems of tourist businesses and destinations.

Such measures are particularly important in the context of the current slowdown in the tourism sector, with a view to helping the sector develop more competitively.

To help map an organic course of development for European tourism, giving priority to the involvement of local communities, the Committee of the Region has outlined a few guidelines for Community tourism policies:

A. Securing an appropriate level of safety and quality in the EU transport network (road, rail, sea and air) so that it is better able to cope with the volume of leisure time traffic

The CoR agrees with the European Commission that the liberalisation of transport and the development of networks, the improved efficiency of the single market and the growing availability of information society tools will facilitate personal mobility and help to internationalise tourist flows.

The CoR supports the European Commission's view that Community transport policy is a key issue for the tourism sector, in terms of sustainable mobility, the right to passenger safety and transport quality. At this stage, improving transport certainly means placing an emphasis on safety, but other related issues must also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the White Paper on transport has already given guidelines for improving the efficiency, sustainability and quality of the tourist transport system.

Tourism is also crucial for the development of regions with accessibility problems, such as mountain areas, island regions and the outermost regions.

In island regions, air transport systems must be improved and the frequency of services increased, ensuring that sufficient places are available. Action is also needed to improve links between the reference airports for island regions and the trans-European road and rail networks, especially high speed trains.

B. Matching the supply of professionals graduating from college and university courses with the demand for manpower in the tourism industry

The CoR agrees with the Commission's analysis of the main needs in terms of training. Tourism currently has a relatively unskilled workforce in most of the main subsectors and especially in SMEs. Whilst there is demand for new skills, for example those associated with ICT, the CoR is aware that local and regional authorities face a significant challenge in stimulating growth particularly in the small and micro business sector that makes up a significant element of the sector. With a downward pressure on prices from larger tour operators, small family businesses in the tourism sector suffer from the lack of perceivable career path and are forced to cut training opportunities, leading to further difficulties with recruitment.

Significant progress has been made at EU level on the issue of "tourism for all". The CoR welcomes the European Commission proposals to look more closely at access for the physically disabled. However, the CoR notes the broad definition given to the topic by the Belgian Presidency Tourism Conference that took place in July 2001 and would welcome further proposals from the Commission in the field of social tourism.

In this context, steps can be taken to put measures already used in other areas effectively into practice (such as the "Europass training document for tourism"), and "transform learning into innovation, taking into account the "fragile" reality regarding human resources (...), considering a method (...) of learning which is more complex than conventional training, and using bottom-up/top-down approaches, partnerships and cooperation between all the stakeholders concerned."

It is vitally important to assess the possibility of setting up a specific training network for tourism skills, not least within existing Community programmes (Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, Tempus, Erasmus). This could dovetail with employment measures (Equal) and link up with training bodies (ALFA).

The CoR would suggest that with this in mind, more financial resources (in the context of the Structural Funds) should be earmarked for pre-university training courses, as there is a need to create a hard core of minimum medium/high-level skills which will then form a better basis for degree-level studies.

The e-learning dimension of the enhancement of the knowledge culture can be a source of value added in the preparation of any initiative in this sector, giving greater uniformity to sectoral training practices.

While on the one hand, the introduction of teaching mechanisms aimed at transferring technical and technological skills should be stepped up, it is also time to link up the various training experiences currently going on in the Member States, in order to help disseminate a common culture in the area of tourism teaching and identify the professional skills needed in this sphere.

The key role of high-level training cannot be underestimated (for instance, the recent establishment in Italy of the "FOR-MED Master on new technologies for the enhancement and management of Mediterranean cultural heritage", by the Ravello European University Centre for Cultural Heritage).

C. Conducting a standardisation project to create a system for evaluating accommodation and

hospitality so as to ensure that average standards are met when awarding marks for the quality of structures and services

Improving the quality of tourism is a central element of various European programmes. The World Tourism Organisation stresses that quality is the perception by the tourist of the extent to which his expectations are met by his experience of the product. Quality control methods are covered by the ISO 9000 and 14000 series, the EFQM and star ratings (in addition to national evaluation systems).

Quality development is built on structural policies, consumer protection, environment policy, transport management and a spirit of enterprise.

The CoR believes that any genuine quality policy must place the tourist at the centre. As well as the identification of needs and the capacity to meet them, there must be a single proposal that gives a precise definition of the quality of the various components of the tourism system.

Customer satisfaction and *customer retention* practices provide useful points of reference from which effective evaluation methods can be derived.

Organisational and commercial consultancy, the planning of awareness campaigns, and financial incentives all dovetail to make a programme that recognises high quality tourist structures, the aim being to work at harmonising the quality standard evaluation system for accommodation and hospitality facilities.

Clearly, there is currently no single Community system able to set quality standards for the supply of services to tourists, be it hotel accommodation or restaurants, transport or the range of leisure time options, etc. While expressing the hope that it will prove possible to arrive at uniform criteria and standards at EU level, the CoR calls on the Commission to evaluate regularly existing national systems.

D. Promoting official recognition by accommodation and hospitality structures of a charter of duties to the tourist

The principle of user-identification that lies behind *customer satisfaction* also underlies the proposed adoption of a European charter of duties to the tourist. The need to protect tourists' rights goes hand in hand with the opportunity to facilitate the achievement of common quality standards and launch a broad programme to monitor those involved in the initiative.

A useful reference point for the European charter of duties is the *Ethics Charter for Cultural Tourism* presented by the European Observatory on Cultural Heritage (Ravello European University Centre for Cultural Heritage) in Paestum on 5 November 1999 on the occasion of the second Mediterranean Archaeological Tourism Fair, an event devised and hosted by the Province of Salerno.

The paragraph of the charter relating to hospitality duties is especially important. While the document takes into account the relationship between the tourist user and cultural heritage, the underlying spirit underlines the need to place the tourist at the centre of every measure, requiring "hospitality coherent to the promises made and respectful towards the guests. In addition to adequate information, it will consequently be necessary to arrange a fitting range of high-quality accommodation and other services to be provided without discrimination of any kind. For their part, visitors must be aware of the specific nature not only of the customs and habits of any country they visit, but also of its culture. Religious and moral tradition and beliefs of the inhabitants should be particularly recognised and respected. The criteria set forth in this Ethics Charter of Cultural Tourism are in no way intended to dictate rules to either institutions or individuals. They have been

developed with the aim of highlighting universal principles capable of fostering travelling modes in keeping with the criteria that should govern cultural tourism, and encouraging all of the individuals involved to behave responsibly. This Charter has been drawn up with specific reference to the conventions, recommendations and directives formulated on various official occasions and has been purposely designed for international and national organisations, as well as operators working directly in the field."

The underlying principle that is most relevant to the need to draw up a charter of duties for those hosting tourists can be summed up by a basic consideration that is valid for tourism in general and not just cultural tourism. Cultural tourism, as the Ethics Charter for Cultural Tourism states, "brings people from all over the world into contact with communities of different origins and often of different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, by fostering friendship and better relations between these, it becomes an essential prerequisite for the growth of the local as well as the international communities. Cultural tourism is an authentic factor of solidarity and peace."

Starting from this type of approach, the CoR would stress that respect for the human dignity of the tourist certainly ties in with the duties of hospitality, over and above the supply of any commercial service. Enshrining this principle in a Community charter of duties is extremely important, both politically and culturally.

E. Using a geographical survey in the Member States to seek and identify new tourist user profiles following 11 September 2001, highlighting cultural tourism and ecotourism and promoting the deseasonalisation of tourist flows

In its discussion of changes in the EU's demographic structure, the European Commission notes that one of the main problems with tourism is volume: "... its concentration on specific, restricted periods of the year."

Culture and environment are ideal ways of addressing some of the most pressing issues regarding the development of tourism. Cultural tourism has been a major resource in Europe for some time. It is in this direction that further efforts should be focused in order to set up a supply network that is as well-coordinated as possible, and that can generate synergistic effects between various regions that share historical, artistic or gastronomic traditions. This should involve harnessing the major resource of rural tourism through systematic and strategic action that will also generate positive knock-on effects for the agriculture sector.

The project set up by the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage, entitled "The Mediterranean programme for cultural heritage" can provide useful pointers here. The centre has set up a real cultural bridge between the countries of the northern Mediterranean by establishing a Mediterranean observatory-laboratory that periodically brings together representatives of European, North African and Middle Eastern cultural traditions, with the aim of stimulating research and training activities aimed at protecting and promoting the cultural heritage of the regions concerned. This gives a practical idea of the value of intercultural exchange designed to improve tourism patterns.

The CoR is in favour of the implementation of a European Agenda 21 for tourism. This is already the focus for debate within the steering group chaired by the Commission, which is to present a paper at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg in September. To promote this strategy, there are already plans for an Agenda 21 of the Mediterranean and of the Baltic Sea, Destination 21 in Denmark and a local Agenda 21 in Calvià (Balearics, Spain). In addition to the active Agenda 21 efforts of many local authorities, Sweden has recently produced quality criteria for rating eco-tourism arrangements in the environment and cultural spheres.

The CoR agrees with the objectives set by the Commission in its Communication, which are: "to prevent and reduce the territorial and environmental impact of tourism in destinations; to control the growth of transport linked to tourism; to promote responsible tourism as a factor for social and cultural development."

This should be the aim for future measures designed to spread a culture of environmental protection, closely entwined with the rediscovery and enhancement of a broad historical, artistic and cultural heritage.

In the light of these comments, a survey should be conducted in the Member States with the aim of pinpointing the new types of user and preparing appropriate tools for supporting and accompanying demand.

Brussels, 10 October 2002.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the Committee of the Regions

of the Committee of the Regions

Albert Bore

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¹ OJ C 317 of 6.11.2000, p. 40

² See European Parliament Resolution of 18.2.2000, CoR opinion of 15.6.2000 (CdR 291/99 - OJ C 317, 6.11.2000, p. 40) and ESC opinion of 26.1.2000 (CES 93/2000).

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CdR 99/2002 fin EN/o

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