Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe

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PURPOSE: Communication presenting a new political framework for tourism in Europe.

CONTENT: tourism is an economic activity capable of generating growth and employment in the EU. With some 1.8 million businesses, primarily SMEs, employing approximately 5.2 % of the total workforce, the European tourism industrygenerates over 5 % of EU GDP, a figure which is steadily rising. Tourism therefore represents the third largest socioeconomic activity in the EU after the trade and distribution and construction sectors. Taking into account the sectors linked to it,tourism's contribution to GDP is even greater; it is estimated to generate over 10 % of the EU's GDP and provide approximately 12 % of all jobs. In this regard, observing the trend over the last ten years, growth in employment in the tourism sector has almost always been more pronounced than in the rest of the economy. In addition, the EU remains the world's favourite tourist destination, with 370 million international tourist arrivals in 2008, or 40 % of arrivals around the world.

However, European tourism has faced difficult times. Firstly, the economic and financial crisis affecting all economies since 2008 has had a considerable effect on demand for tourism services. Tourist activity in Europe fell by approximately 5.6 % in 2009. The difficulties have been aggravated by the eruption of the Eyjafjöll volcano. The interruption of air traffic during April and May 2010 due to the presence of volcanic ash clouds had a major effect on travel in Europe, causing significant disruption to airlines, travel agencies and tour operators as well as tourists themselves.

This difficult background for the tourism industry has highlighted a number of challenges which the European tourism sector must face. It is essential that all operators in the sector combine their efforts and work within a consolidated political framework that takes account of the new EU priorities set out in the 'Europe 2020' strategy: Europe must remain the world's No 1 destination, able to capitalise on its territorial wealth and diversity.

With this Communication, the Commission intends to **encourage a coordinated approach for initiatives linked to tourism and define a new framework for action** to increase its competitiveness and its capacity for sustainable growth. It therefore proposes a number of European or multinational initiatives aimed at achieving these objectives, drawing in full on the Union's competence in the field of tourism as introduced by the Lisbon Treaty.

The actions planned are as follows:

- develop a coherent strategy for diversifying the promotion of tourist services and capitalise on Europe's common heritage, particularly by creating a European heritage label, alongside actions such as European Heritage Days or the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage;
- encourage the integration into tourism strategies of 'natural' heritage, which will also benefit from labelling initiatives;
- the Commission will launch an 'ICT and tourism' platform for stakeholders to facilitate the adaptation of the tourism sector and its businesses to market developments in new information technologies and improve their competitiveness by making the maximum use of possible synergies between the two sectors;

- in preparing its forthcoming communication on electronic commerce in the internal market, which will assess the implementation of the electronic commerce Directive, the Commission will examine the possibilities for strengthening the integration of the tourism sector in this context;
- in order to support training in the tourism sector, the Commission will endeavour to promote the opportunities offered by various EU programmes such as Leonardo or the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) with its 'Erasmus for young entrepreneurs' and 'E-skills for innovation' strands;
- provide a voluntary tourism exchange mechanism between Member States, enabling in particular certain key groups such as young or elderly people, people with reduced mobility and low-income families to travel, particularly during the low season;
- develop a voluntary online information exchange mechanism to improve the coordination of school holidays in the Member States, without prejudice to their cultural traditions;
- in its annual communication, 'Consumer Markets Scoreboard', the Commission will monitor the market by measuring European consumer satisfaction with various tourism services (transport, hire, accommodation, travel, package tours);
- in the short term, the Commission will develop a pilot project aimed at networking research institutes, universities, public and private monitoring units, regional and national authorities and national tourism offices;
- in the medium term, based on the results of the pilot project, the Commission will promote the implementation of a 'virtual tourism observatory' to support and coordinate research activities by the various national research institutes and provide socioeconomic data on tourism at European level;
- develop, on the basis of NECSTouR or EDEN, a system of indicators for the sustainable management of destinations. Based on this system, the Commission will develop a label for promoting tourist destinations;
- organise awareness-raising campaigns for European tourists concerning the choice of destinations and means of transport, relationships with the local population in the destinations visited, and combating the exploitation of woman and children;
- develop a European 'Qualité Tourisme' brand, based on existing national experience, to increase consumer security and confidence in tourism products and reward rigorous efforts by tourism professionals whose aim is quality of tourism service for customer satisfaction;
- facilitate identification by the European tourism industry of risks linked to climate change in order to avoid loss-making investments, and explore opportunities for developing and supplying alternative tourism services;
- propose a charter for sustainable and responsible tourism and establish a European prize for tourism businesses and destinations respecting the values set out in the charter;
- propose a strategy for sustainable coastal and marine tourism;
- establish or strengthen cooperation between the EU and the main emerging countries (China, Russia, India, Brazil) and Mediterranean countries to promote sustainable and responsible tourism development models and the exchange of best practice;
- create a true 'Europe brand' in cooperation with the Member States to complement promotional efforts at national and regional level and enable European destinations to distinguish themselves from other international destinations;
- promote the visiteurope.com website in order to increase the attractiveness of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality tourist destinations, particularly among emerging countries;
- encourage joint promotional actions at major international events or large-scale tourism fairs and exhibitions;
- strengthen EU participation in international bodies, particularly within the context of the World Tourism Organisation, the OECD, T20 and Euro-Med;

This Communication notes that consolidated framework is a first step. The Commission will continue to discuss tourism initiatives between now and the European Forum on tourism in November 2010, when a

more detailed action plan may be discussed with the Member States and with public and private European tourism operators. In the medium term, it will then take stock of the strategy in order to assess its success and move forward.