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

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe.

Parliament recalls that the tourism sector accounts for 10% of GDP and 12% of total employment, making it the third most substantial socio-economic activity in the EU and that it plays a key role in the economic development and economic, social and regional cohesion of the EU and in achieving the goals of the EU 2020 strategy. The EU is the world's No 1 tourist destination in terms of international arrivals but it faces many challenges: the global economic crisis, the competitiveness of other destinations outside the EU and the diversity of tourist attractions on offer, the effects of climate change and seasonal fluctuations in tourist activity, demographic developments in Europe, the growing impact of information and communications technologies, etc.

Members recall that tourism has become a new competence of the EU, which gives it more effectiveness and visibility. On the basis of this new competence, an EU strategy with clear and ambitious goals needs to be drawn up, in full compliance with the principle of subsidiarity. Parliament welcomes the policy strategy presented by the Commission, which sets out 21 specific actions to reinvigorate the sector and provides a solid basis from which to develop an EU policy on competitive, modern, high-quality, sustainable tourism that is accessible to all.

It deplores, however, **the lack of coherence within the Commission with regard to tourism policy,** and calls for a coordinating and integrating approach. It calls on the Commission to submit **an integrated tourism strategy by the end of 2012**, in line with and in addition to the current strategy and its implementation plan.

Members stress the need for close cooperation between the EU, international, national, regional and local authorities on the one hand and between the institutions as a whole and stakeholders on the other. The Commission is asked to consider introducing two new principles for tourism: ‘interregionality’ and ‘complementarity’, in order to promote joint planning and cooperation between tourist services within a single geographical area, i.e. either between neighbouring regions belonging to different Member States or at a specific thematic level between regions linked by common elements.

Competitive, modern and good quality tourism: tourism should be regarded as part and parcel of the EU’s industrial policy and innovation policy and asserts the importance of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Parliament agrees with the Commission’s proposal that **a ‘Europe Brand’** should be developed in conjunction with the Member States, and local and regional authorities and national tourism agencies, in order to promote Europe as a whole worldwide as a tourist destination. It also welcomes the ‘European heritage label’ initiative as a tool giving prominence to some of the important sites in the history of European integration. Members call on the Commission to support the inclusion on the World Heritage List of popular traditions within the Member States, including culinary traditions.

In order to promote European tourism, Parliament stresses particularly the need for **a long-term strategy for more coordinated and simplified visa procedures,** and calls on the Commission to consider the possibility of deploying the EU delegation offices in the world in order to issue tourist visas in collaboration with the national embassies of the Member States and to explore additional ways of

simplifying the issue of tourist visas, such as ‘group tourist visas’ for organised groups. Furthermore, in view of various emergency situations that place tourists abroad in danger, the European External Action Service (EEAS) could be asked to consider whether it would be appropriate to codify a uniform procedure for issuing notices advising against travel, creating a **single European code** for the seriousness of the situations concerned. Parliament calls on the Commission to draw conclusions from recent emergencies, such as the volcanic eruption, and to draw up specific scenarios for EU crisis management, so that coordination and uniform action in all Member States with regard to information and the measures to be taken become the rule.

The resolution suggests other measures for the promotion of tourism: (i) measures to foster innovation and technological development in micro-enterprises and SMEs; (ii) creation of a Virtual Tourism Monitoring Centre that links up not just research institutions, but also enterprises and public authorities, with the aim of driving forward market research; (iii) the development of innovative actions to promote ad hoc European holiday packages during major historic, cultural and sporting events such as the Olympic Games, and the Universal Expositions; (iv) develop the potential of the European Travel Commission's (ETC) web portal www.visiteurope.com to maximise its availability and full accessibility and make it a genuine European tourism platform; (v) the creation of a ‘European Tourism Card’ for the purpose of encouraging tourists from within and outside the EU who travel in Europe to do so regularly; (vi) assess the feasibility of a ‘European quality tourism label’, identifying common quality criteria, whilst **avoiding a proliferation of labels**. The number of labels must be reduced, to prevent possible confusion on the part of consumer. Members call for an assessment of whether the ‘European quality label’ and the ‘Eco-label for tourist accommodation service’ could be gradually merged under the heading of one label; (vii) harmonise gradually the accommodation classification systems (hotels, guesthouses, rented rooms, etc.) through the identification of common minimum criteria, starting from the positive experiences of industry associations (ex. Hotelstars Union); (viii) prepare a map of existing professional skills (Tourism Skill Competence Framework) as a starting point from which practical steps to match employment market supply and demand in the tourism sector in Europe can be developed; (ix) encourage mobility and promote lifelong learning, vocational and university training schemes and apprenticeships in the tourism sector.

At the same time, Members ask for improved mutual recognition by the Member States of professional qualifications in the tourist industry, in order to allow those already working in the sector and those planning to do so to find the best job opportunities. They ask the Commission and e Member States to modernise infrastructure for the different modes of transport, with a particular focus on the progress and timely implementation of Trans-European Transport Networks projects and on the completion of the **Single European Sky** and integrated electronic ticket sales systems for the various means of transport. Parliament calls on the Commission to assess the feasibility of a Charter of tourists’ rights and responsibilities comprising principles with regard to accessibility, provision of information, transparent pricing, compensation, etc.

Sustainable and diversified tourism: Members welcome the Commission’s readiness to diversify the types of tourism available, which would help offset the effects of seasonality. They take the view that in order to differentiate European tourism from that of other countries or continents, it is crucial to link the traditional tourism sector with what the territory has to offer in terms of products and services and tangible and intangible assets. They stress the need for close cooperation with the Council of Europe in this context, as well as with networks such as NECSTouR and EDEN in order to exchange good practice.

Parliament notes the fact that demographic developments in Europe will give rise to continuing growth in health tourism and in spa tourism in particular. It calls on the Commission, in view of the fact that there are a variety of Community rules covering spa-tourism issues, to consider the possibility of tabling a **single legislative proposal on spa tourism** in order to give the sector a controlled organic structure, encouraging its competitiveness and specifying immediately that spa companies operating in the Member States, as providers of health services, are excluded from the scope of Directive 2006/123/EC.

Members insist particularly that, given the history of the European continent, the Commission should promote more vigorously Europe's industrial heritage, whose potential has not been sufficiently recognised, and that rural tourism and agritourism should be properly supported. They also stress the benefits of nature tourism as well tourism related to sports or health. Parliament emphasises the economic importance of 'shopping tourism'. It calls on the Commission to examine the possibility of designating a European day of responsible and sustainable tourism.

With regard to **the environment**, Parliament asks the Commission to promote a cross-cutting Community initiative on the **environmental impact of tourism**, with particular reference to European biodiversity, the waste cycle, energy and water saving, a healthy diet and the use of land and natural resources. It underlines the great impact of climate change on Europe's tourist areas, notably coastal regions, islands and mountain regions, and consider that strategies should be drawn up to counteract this, by enhancing natural risk prevention and mitigation policies, and safeguarding the sustainability of the fauna, flora and landscape of the areas concerned.

With regard to beach tourism, Members call for compensatory measures to alleviate the damage inflicted on tourist operators by the introduction of new legislation resulting in the loss of acquired rights and losses linked to unamortized investments in refurbishing facilities or ensuring they conformed to the legislation previously in force.

Tourism for all: emphasising that the inherently seasonal nature of tourism, Parliament calls on the Commission to draw up a plan to foster a progressive reduction in the seasonal nature of tourism, continuing with action allowing disadvantaged people, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, young people and low-income families to have easier access to holidays, particularly during the low season. It stresses the importance of ensuring, under a new EU strategy on disability, access for people with disabilities, not just with regard to transport but also with regard to accommodation, catering, information accessible to everyone and tourist services in general. Members also call on the Commission to promote also so-called VFR tourism (Visiting Friends and Relatives) as an important way of enhancing integration in European culture.

Tourism and resources: Parliament calls on the Commission to coordinate, extend and raise the profile of financial instruments managed by various directorates-general and intended to boost the competitiveness of tourism, and to check they are being correctly used, particularly with reference to the ERDF, the EAFRD, the ESF and the EFF. In a context of budgetary restrictions, it considers it is essential to build synergies between the various existing financial instruments. Members emphasise that **tourism should continue to play an important role in cohesion policy within the framework of the 2014-2020 financial perspective**. The next financial perspectives and Structural Fund regulations must include among their priorities the rehabilitation of tourist areas that have fallen into decline. Members ask that a specific tourism programme, targeting in particular micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, be established, encouraging partnerships between firms and public-private partnerships on pan-European tourism projects.

Other important issues for the tourist sector: amongst other factors which could help tourism, Members request that the Commission table by September 2011 a legislative proposal revising the Package Travel Directive 90/314/EEC, in order to ensure that consumers and firms in the sector have a clear legal framework both for standard situations and for exceptional situations caused, for example, by certain climatic and natural phenomena, or by political troubles. They also highlight the opportunity this presents for **a reduced VAT rate on tourism to be progressively harmonised across the Member States** as a necessary condition for transparent competition among tourist companies within the EU and with non-EU countries.

Lastly, Parliament stresses the need for an active competition policy monitoring any trend towards concentration of the sector or abuse of a dominant position.