New challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe

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The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted the own-initiative report by Isabella DE MONTE (S&D, IT) on new challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe.

The report recalled that Europe is the world's number one tourist destination with the number of international tourists arriving in the EU forecast to increase by 140 million each year until 2025. However, the tourism industry in Europe faces a number of **new challenges**, among them the digitisation of distribution channels, the development of the new sharing economy sector, increasing competition from emerging, less expensive third-market destinations, changing consumer behaviour, the transition to an experience economy, the demand for quality client service, the need to attract and retain skilled staff, demographic changes, and seasonality.

The Commission's action framework: Members called on the Commission to report back to Parliament on the implementation of the actions set out in its 2010 communication on Tourism and the use of budget allocations under the Structural Funds and the relevant EU programmes. It also called on it to present a **new strategy for EU tourism** to replace or update the 2010 communication.

Funding: Members strongly encouraged the Commission to examine the possibility of **creating a section within the next multiannual financial framework that is dedicated exclusively to tourism**, instead of being financed from the budgets of other policy areas.

Pan-European and transnational tourism products: efforts should be made to develop new transnational European tourism products. Member States are encouraged to **promote new tourism routes** by regenerating disused areas, streets, railways, deserted paths and outdated routes.

The report highlighted the need for **travel agents and tour operators to promote the 112 European emergency number on relevant websites and e-tickets.**

The potential of **sport tourism**, which could in future become one of the most dynamic sectors in the developing European travel industry has been stressed.

Quality: whilst acknowledging the difference in standards of service quality in the tourism sector, Members are of the opinion that **quality standards** are important as a means of levelling the playing field for operators and increasing transparency for the consumer, thereby helping to strengthen the confidence of all parties. Stakeholders are called upon to take further the discussion of how the EU can promote agreed **quality standards for tourism services**.

Sharing economy: the report recalled that the sharing economy, or collaborative consumption, is a new socio-economic model that has taken off thanks to the technological revolution, with the internet connecting people through **online platforms** on which transactions involving goods and services can be conducted securely and transparently.

The **current legislation is not suited to the sharing economy**, and that for this reason local and national governments have started to analyse such online platforms and are trying to regulate their effects, often applying disproportionate measures which are somewhat disparate within the Union.

Consideration should be given to establishing an **appropriate regulatory framework** within the overarching EU digital single market strategy.

The report emphasised that platforms need to be fully accessible and that consumers using such sites must be correctly informed and not misled, and the privacy of their data protected. The importance of a viable and transparent system of reviews is stressed, and of ensuring that **consumers are not penalised by service providers for leaving negative reviews**.

The Commission is called upon to assess the economic and social impact of the sharing economy and its implications for the tourism industry, consumers, technology companies and public authorities, and to report back to Parliament on the outcome of the initiatives it has undertaken so far.

The power of digitisation: Members called on the Commission to define jointly with industry and tourism associations a **smart roadmap of initiatives** focusing on the wider scope of innovation (process, ICT, research) and on the required skills, in order to encourage travel and tourism companies to adopt digital tools and use them more efficiently.

In this area, the Commission is called upon to:

- present a comprehensive report encompassing an assessment of the current state of play as regards digitisation in the EU tourism market;
- pursue in detail any abuses which may arise in the area of online booking, and to adapt and develop these new ways of booking services;
- refocus funds and programmes in order to better support the digitisation of European tourism companies;
- ensure that service providers are given fair and equal access to relevant data by travel and transport operators in order to facilitate the deployment of digital multimodal information and ticketing service;
- adopt a comprehensive proposal to **end the unjustified geo-blocking of access to goods**, services and the best available rate on the basis of geographical location or country of residence.

Member States are called upon to:

- identify and support EU-wide initiatives that foster the use of digital infrastructure and interoperability among different platforms;
- provide free wi-fi in tourism areas and to abolish roaming charges by 15 June 2017;
- encourage access to high-speed broadband as a priority for remote and outermost tourism areas such as islands and coastal, mountain and rural areas in order to enhance the growth of tourism businesses and to reduce the digital gap in the EU;
- develop effective means to counter the **skills shortage** in all parts of the tourism industry, in particular in the area of digitisation.