Tourism sector: working together for a sustainable development and employment

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Helena TORRES MARQUES (PES, Portugal) on the future of European tourism. Parliament pointed out that the sector accounts for 5% of GDP and employment (rising to 12% of GDP if the activity it generates in other sectors such as transport is included) and is undergoing a continuing rate of growth. Europe is still the world's most important tourist destination. Given that tourism issues cut across boundaries, Parliament called for the directorates- general concerned (transport, regional policy, consumer protection, education and culture etc.) to eliminate the existing fragmented planning and produce more closely interlocking Community programmes to guarantee sustainable development of the sector and vertical cohesion encompassing the regions, the national governments and EU institutions. A business impact assessment of all measures with a major effect on tourism needs to be carried out. Parliament is very much in favour of the European Tourism Forum. It also wants to see a strengthening of the Advisory Committee on Tourism at Community level with the participation of European consumer bodies and cultural and environmental heritage protection associations. There is support for a Community-wide framework programme for tourism and for a specific budget heading to be employed so as to enable the various projected measures, especially those related to training or intended to promote innovation, to be pursued coherently. Parliament goes on to stress the importance of sustainable tourism, which must be of high quality, competitive and open to all, but never overstrain the reception capacities of natural and cultural sites. It is in favour of building on Agenda 21 to promote targeted initiatives to foster sustainable tourist activity, including labelling for tourist services and travel organisers; fiscal measures to redress the adverse effects of tourism; integrated management practices in sensitive areas such as coastal and mountain areas and the inclusion of tourism-related aspects in other economic activities. Tourism is also a resource for employment. Parliament proposes that Community funds should be used to develop new forms of tourism to make the industry less seasonal, such as rural tourism, health and especially spa tourism, or social tourism aimed not only at workers but also the young and the retired. Parliament makes specific recommendations on personnel training. The Commission is asked to propose a promotion programme to be implemented outside the EU's frontiers. The Community's administrative resources must be upto the tasks that need doing. Finally, Parliament called on the Convention on the future of Europe to evaluate the need for the tourism sector to have a legal basis enabling it to give force to Community measures, by including in the Treaty a genuine common policy on tourism which, by encouraging the essential differences between the countries and regions, would make it possible to take coordinated measures for the development of European tourism.