New prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism

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PURPOSE: to put forward some basic orientations and to invite the Member States to take action to improve the sustainability of European tourism from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

CONTENT: Ensuring the economic, social and environmental sustainability of European tourism is crucial both as a contribution to sustainable development in Europe and worldwide, and for the viability, continued growth, competitiveness and commercial success of this economically highly important sector. The challenges for sustainable European tourism are linked both to consumption patterns, in particular seasonal spread and travel for the purpose of tourism, and to the sector's production patterns, i.e. the value chain and the tourist destinations. Sustainable tourist behaviour and good public and private governance are key to changing unsustainable tourism patterns.

Stakeholders at all levels have started to prepare the ground for better matching of sustainability requirements in tourism and using its potential for sustainable development. Although not specifically targeting the tourism sector, the European Community contributes significantly to these efforts with a wide range of policies and measures that favour sustainable development, both in its global responsibilities and within the European Union. The Commission, therefore, considers the right pathway to the sustainability of European tourism to be reinforcing the existing framework for action and making best use of it. This means relying mainly on the positive effects of established Community policies and measures, while enhancing them, and on initiatives in favour of the sustainability of tourism that stakeholders other than the Community undertake in this field. Some specific measures to fill gaps should complement this approach. In the international context, the Community approach is thus to continue its policy of promoting the sustainability of tourism as a matter of trade and of assistance to the developing countries. It seeks reinforced co-operation for sustainable tourism with United Nations bodies and other international organisations, in respect of its global responsibility and in Europe. The Commission envisages several measures for strengthening the Community contribution to the sustainability of European tourism. These aim at increasing the benefit from European Governance and from the various Community policies and measures affecting European tourism and its sustainability. The Commission also wants to enhance co-operation with the World Tourism Organization and between all stakeholders of the tourism sector in Europe.

The Commission intends to launch a Tourism Sustainability Group composed of representatives of the various stakeholder categories. This group will have the task of drafting a detailed framework for action, which allocates specific activities to the individual stakeholders and include an agreed timetable for implementation. The Commission is willing to promote and support the implementation of activities defined by the group.

Specific initiatives will concern better monitoring and reporting of the sustainability of tourism, activities that further sustainable tourism consumption patterns by European citizens, and promoting sustainability in the tourism value chain and destinations. The development and use of appropriate information tools and networks will assist these initiatives.

The Commission expects other stakeholders in Europe to contribute significantly to the efforts for implementing sustainable tourism. This concerns European citizens and tourists, private sector enterprises, tourist destinations and public authorities, and civil society stakeholders.

The Commission plans to regularly report back on the progress of implementing these basic orientations.