New prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism

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Following a brief exchange of views on the Commission’s communication, the Council adopted conclusions the main points of which were the following:

It noted that the European Union maintains its place as the most important tourism destination in the world, representing a large economic weight and contributing considerably to the employment of the European Union's workforce.

It stressed that the European Union is one of the world's richest and most varied tourist regions, with a huge variety of landscapes and cultures, good-quality infrastructure and a highly professional tourism sector, offering important business opportunities for sustainable growth and employment as well as opportunities for regional development. It takes the view that the rich potential of the new Member States for tourism, which could generate annual earnings of 46 billion euro and support up to 3 million jobs, needs to be fully tapped and notes that the economic development of countries such as China, India, Russia and Brazil will create substantial additional demand, which the European tourism industry needs to be well-positioned to meet.

It takes the view that a number of challenges of an economic and demographic nature, such as the increase in tourists in older age categories, the particular and increasing demands of young tourists, increasing competition from other tourist destinations and the decline foreseen in the European working population from 2010 need to be addressed.

It stresses that the European institutions, the Member States and regions need to continue their cooperation, stimulating the exchange of information among the stakeholders in tourism, in order to develop appropriate policies for sustainable tourism and welcomes the setting up of a Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) by the Commission, with the task of steering and monitoring the preparation and implementation of a coherent set of actions to be undertaken by the different tourism stakeholders, with a view to the preparation, by 2007, of a "European Agenda 21 for Tourism".

It invites the Member States to:

– participate in the implementation of a cooperative approach between tourism stakeholders with a view to contributing to the work of the TSG;

– encourage the existing bodies specialised in sustainable tourism issues to network at the European level in order to facilitate the exchange of information between tourism destinations.

It invites the European tourism industry and other stakeholders of the tourism sector to:

– participate actively in and support the efforts undertaken by the European Union and the Member States to develop sustainable European tourism, in particular through the work of the TSG.

– contribute to the development of products and services based on sustainable patterns of production and consumption, promote corporate social responsibility and contribute to dialogue and cooperation between public and private stakeholders.

– integrate sustainability, eco-efficiency and exchange of good practices within business strategies and activities in order to strengthen performance and competitiveness in the global market.

It invites the Commission, the Member States and other stakeholders of the tourism sector to:

– work towards the design and use of approaches to and tools for the development and promotion of sustainable patterns of production and consumption with a view to improving the competitiveness, quality and employment potential of the European tourism sector;

– cooperate in favour of the sustainability of tourism destinations, in particular through the protection of natural areas, biodiversity and cultural heritage, which are leading resources and important assets of European tourism;

– make the best possible use of information and communication technologies and environmental technologies for the measures to be developed and implemented;

It further invites the Commission to:

– integrate sustainability concerns into Community policies and initiatives affecting European tourism, in particular by means of its impact assessment tool;

– facilitate the creation of a system to network regional, national, transnational and international bodies and actors so as to cooperate and exchange information on sustainable tourism initiatives;

– inform the Member States about the activities of the TSG in the first half of 2006 and submit a communication on a "European Agenda 21 for Tourism" to the Council before the end of 2007, with recommendations for concrete actions to be implemented by the different public and private stakeholders”.