New prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Luis QUEIRO (EPP-ED, PT) on new prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism. MEPs noted that tourism was at the heart of the Lisbon process, with great potential for growth and job creation, in particular among young people and women. The committee also pointed out that, at international level, tourism was extremely competitive. European tourism sectors and industry needed to be well-positioned to meet the significant additional demand that would be created by the development of markets such as Brazil , China , India and Russia .

It was vitally important to complete the internal market in tourist services and to achieve genuine equality between tourist operators. To this end, a Community-wide classification, to be used in particular for the classification of hotel facilities, should be introduced. The Council was also urged to restart work on the proposed revision of the directive amending Directive 77/388/EC as regards the special VAT scheme for travel agents, thereby maintaining the competitive position of operators established in the EU vis-à-vis operators from third countries. In addition, the Council should conclude the decision-making process on the proposed directive amending Directive 77/388/EC as regards reduced VAT rates for restaurants.

The report highlighted safety and security issues, and called inter alia for a contact group to be set up at European level to coordinate information on the management of health crises, natural disasters or acts of terrorism. The Commission was also urged to evaluate the effectiveness of the 1986 Council Recommendation on fire safety in hotels and to promote EU voluntary standards to improve safety aspects of tourism services. Measures should be taken to improve the operation and awareness of the European emergency number .

The committee emphasised the dangers of mass tourism, which represented a threat to local natural and socio-economic balances. The Commission should endeavour to coordinate national holiday arrangements in order to even out the burden on access routes and tourist infrastructures and achieve a more efficient and sustainable deployment of human resources by reducing seasonal fluctuations in employment levels. MEPs also pointed out that the gradual ageing of the population would lead to an increase in the number of off-season tourists, and called on the Commission to encourage the development of senior citizens' tourism within the EU through a low season "third age" campaign which would help to improve older people's quality of life, create jobs and generate demand and growth in the European economy.

Lastly, the committee recalled that transport was essential to tourism, and called for measures to promote combined train and bicycle travel and stimulate inland waterway tourism. While welcoming the Commission's initiative to establish state-aid guidelines for regional airports and low-cost companies, so as to improve legal certainty and ensure fair competition, MEPs nevertheless wanted the development of low-cost airlines to be supervised in order to avoid a proliferation of air links to specific regions or neighbouring regions. Instead, they called for the interconnection of air transport and collective land transport to be developed to the full.