

Strengthening tourism by leveraging Europe's cultural, natural and maritime heritage

Competitiveness Council
Brussels, 4 December 2014

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

" THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

- the Communication from the Commission on "Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" of March 2010¹;
- the Communication from the Commission on "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe" of June 2010² and the Council conclusions of October 2010 on this Communication of June 2010³;
- the Communication from the Commission on Blue growth: opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth of September 2012⁴;
- the Communication from the Commission on "A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism" of February 2014⁵ and the Opinion from the Committee of the Regions of October 2014⁶;
- the Council Conclusions of May 2014 on "Cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe"⁷;
- the Communication from the Commission "Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe" of July 2014⁸;

¹ Doc. 7110/10.

² Doc. 11883/10.

³ Doc. 14944/10.

⁴ Doc. 13908/12.

⁵ Doc. 6875/14.

⁶ Doc. CDR 2645/2014.

⁷ Doc. 9129/14.

⁸ Doc. 12150/14.

TAKING NOTE

of the outcome of the High level Conference on coastal and maritime tourism and Blue Growth which was organized by the Greek Presidency and the Commission on 10 March 2014, emphasizing the growing dynamics of the maritime sector, its economic and social benefits, its contribution to the enhancement of local economies;

and of the 13th European Forum on Tourism held in Naples on 30 and 31 October 2014, which highlighted the importance of synergies between tourism and culture and their contribution to economic growth and employment, as well as the importance of making better use, at all levels, of the opportunities offered by digitalisation and innovation for a high quality workforce, a more sustainable and inclusive mobility and for keeping Europe's position as a top tourist destination;

1. NOTES that tourism is a key sector of the European economy, generating over 5% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product and employing around 11.9 million people in 2.2 million enterprises, and has an increasingly positive impact on economic growth and employment in Europe. Taking into account the sectors linked to tourism, its contribution to GDP is even greater and it is estimated to generate over 10% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product;
2. RECALLS that Europe is one of the world's major cultural tourism destinations thanks to its rich heritage; NOTES that cultural tourism accounts for about 40% of European tourism and that tourism represents a powerful incentive for preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of Europe;
3. EMPHASISES that Europe's cultural heritage contributes to the appeal of tourism destinations; ACKNOWLEDGES that tourism allows visitors to access and discover the cultural heritage of the European continent, thus contributing to their personal growth and knowledge, developing a spirit of tolerance and respect for other cultures and people;
4. UNDERLINES that tourism has to be performed and developed in a sustainable way to preserve natural and environmental values for future generations and high quality of waters for bathing and other tourism-related activities, in line with an ecosystem based approach for human activities in the marine environment and ACKNOWLEDGES the importance to protect this resource base upon which economic and social tourism related activities depend; STRESSES the importance of natural heritage and its sustainable use for the development of tourism, including coastal, maritime, mountain, rural, spa, health and eco-tourism;
- 4bis. RECOGNISES that coastal and maritime tourism accounts for one third of all tourist activities in Europe, giving employment to almost 3.2 million people, generating 183 billion Euros to Europe's GDP, and making up 51% of tourist accommodation across Europe⁹;
5. CONSIDERS that activities and sites notably related to cultural, coastal and maritime tourism such as underwater archaeological parks and sites, sea and underwater museums, protected natural sites, coastal towers and fortresses, historic lighthouses, monuments, historic buildings built on the coast and the activities of their heritage communities are part of Europe's common cultural heritage and therefore deserve to be further promoted and used in a sustainable manner to the benefit of all Europeans;
6. STRESSES the potential of a digital single market to modernize and develop tourism and new business models and to promote and support all tourism services and providers; HIGHLIGHTS the importance of creating a fully functioning internal market for these services, which should offer legal certainty to all actors in the sector; RECOGNISES the crucial importance of the development of appropriate infrastructures to facilitate the use of digital tools in tourism;

⁹ Study in support of policy measures for maritime and coastal tourism at EU level, ECORYS, 2013.

7. RECOGNISES that eco-tourism is attracting an increasing number of environment-minded travellers who may be served by both local products and services and whose numbers may be increased even further by environmentally-friendly business models and practices;
8. EMPHASISES the positive contribution to Europe's goals of economic growth and jobs that seeking and exploiting synergies across different tourism sectors, including cultural, maritime and coastal tourism sectors and with other relevant sectors, such as cultural and creative industries, food and drink, crafts or sports, recreation and health can bring;
9. UNDERLINES that cultural and natural heritage and maritime and coastal tourism can play a specific role in providing better choices for consumers and attracting more businesses through diversification of the tourism offer, extending the tourism season and making tourism accessible to all, in particular families, the young, the elderly and the disabled, including by providing relevant and customer-focused information;
10. RECOGNISES the importance of investment in education and training focusing on issues specific in tourism in order to enhance competitiveness and exchange best practices in Europe;
11. NOTES that the European tourism industry is facing mounting competition from third countries, and UNDERLINES that Europe should therefore capitalise on its cultural richness and diversified natural beauty and offer sustainable and high-quality tourism services;

CALLS ON MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE AND WITH DUE REGARD TO THE SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY PRINCIPLES, AND THE INDUSTRY TO:

- a. continue cooperating for the implementation of the actions along the priorities outlined in the above mentioned Communication "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe";
- b. pursue actively and acting at European, macro-regional, national, regional and local level, in the implementation of the Action Plan contained in the above mentioned Communication on Coastal and Maritime Tourism aimed at boosting competitive and sustainable growth of this sector;
- c. encourage synergies between cultural, maritime and coastal tourism and other policy fields, such as cultural and creative industries, as well as networking and partnerships between private and public actors and also NGOs, and across different levels of governance; encourage also European-wide dialogue among cruise operators, ports and coastal tourism operators aiming at promoting a sustainable development of maritime tourism;
- d. foster competitiveness driven cross-border and inter-regional cooperation on cultural heritage issues, in particular through the promotion of cultural and thematic tourism itineraries that safeguard the authenticity of our cultural legacy, while delivering high quality, sustainable tourism products, accessible to all;
- e. pursue policies and actions to ensure sustainable, seamless and intermodal connectivity to tourism destinations, in particular for potentially attractive smaller and remote areas;
- f. support the market-driven development of new sustainable tourism products and experiences, to reduce the impact of seasonality, and attract more visitors, by focussing on Europe's cultural richness, in particular on its intangible heritage, such as handicrafts, gastronomic traditions, creative sectors, and reviving or using existing networks, such as local festivals, events, pilgrimages;
- g. use statistics and economic data on tourism as well as cultural and natural heritage data to better assess the importance and development of tourism and to implement, on voluntary basis, indicators to ensure that tourism grows in a sustainable manner;

- h. engage in initiatives which contribute to promote the image of Europe as a tourism destination of excellence, for the quality of its services and the uniqueness of its regions, their culture, food, landscapes and lifestyle;
- i. support measures to improve, also through digitalisation, education, training, including vocational training, and skills of tourism workers, employers and managers as well as of heritage professionals to deliver high quality tourism products and also support measures to facilitate labour mobility in the tourism sector;
- j. engage actively with industry and stakeholders, in particular SMEs to deliver more services digitally and to remove all unjustified and disproportionate barriers to innovative market entrants;
- k. take into account the contribution and the impact of cultural, coastal and maritime tourism in defining and implementing policies and in the use of European funds related to tourism, the information about the existence of which should be facilitated for stakeholders and SMEs;
- l. recognise and support the key role played by tourism SMEs in preserving, valorising and enhancing Europe's cultural heritage and in contributing worldwide to promote the image of Europe as a destination of excellence;
- m. ensure that any new measures in the area of tourism clearly provide added value and contribute to its competitiveness, are subject to a full impact assessment, where required, including competitiveness-proofing and do not impose unnecessary burdens on business;
- n. ensure that any relevant legislation with an impact on tourism fully takes into account the effects on SMEs in the tourism industry, including, where appropriate, simplification of regimes for SMEs and exemptions for micro-enterprises.

CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO regularly keep the Council informed about the results of these actions and initiatives."
