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NOTE

from: Presidency

to: Delegations

Subject: Competitiveness Council (Internal Market, Industry, Research)
on 5-6 December 2011
Results of the European Tourism Forum and the Informal Ministerial Meeting in
Kraków (5-7 October)
- Information from the Presidency
(Any other business, item 18(c))

Delegations will find attached the results of the European Tourism Forum and the Informal Ministerial Meeting held in Kraków on 5-7 October 2011.

European Tourism Forum and the Informal Ministerial Meeting in Kraków (5-7 October)

European Tourism Forum, 5-7 October 2011

The Forum was attended by representatives of national administrations responsible for tourism from the EU Member States as well as from Candidate and other non-EU countries, representatives of national tourism organizations, tourism industry stakeholders and academics. The meeting was attended by over 400 participants.

The theme of this year's European Tourism Forum in Krakow, in line with the priorities of the Polish presidency, was: "*The Stimulation of Competitiveness in the Tourism Sector of Europe*". The Krakow Forum, therefore, ensured continuity with the discussions on the actions foreseen in the Commission Communication of 2010 entitled "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe" (doc. 11883/10 of 6 July 2010), which had already started at the ninth European Tourism Forum in Mellieha (Malta, 2010).

Under the topic of competitiveness, two main aspects were discussed by European tourism stakeholders: "Consolidating the socio-economic knowledge base for tourism" and "Developing innovation and ICT in tourism".

Given that a solid socio-economic tourism knowledge base and encouraging innovation and ICT uptake are essential for stimulating competitiveness, participants considered possible methods and instruments that could be adopted to boost them in the sector. The role of the "*Virtual Tourist Observatory*" and the "*ICT and Tourism Platform*" as strategic tools for developing tourism policy was one of the central topics of discussion.

The presentations and discussions during Panel I showed the need to:

- Raise awareness of the socio-economic importance of tourism among public and private stakeholders at different levels.
- Consolidate knowledge of the “tourism system” and of its component actors, activities, interactions and impacts.
- Provide useful information for SMEs, for managers in tourism and other stakeholders in an appropriate and easy-accessible format.
- Establish the Virtual Tourism Observatory as a central source of information, valuable in the process of effective policy- and decision-making at national and regional level. The Observatory should particularly provide information on:
 - Opportunities and threats resulting from the economic situation
 - The challenges of competition and promotion of new tourist destinations.

The presentations and discussions during Panel II showed that:

- The development of modern information and communication technology (supply) creates the need for their use in tourism (demand).
- The existence of ICT technology is necessary but not sufficient for the development of innovative tourism products. There is a need for actions to encourage enterprises in the tourism sector, especially SMEs, to better take up ICT and innovation.
- The online platform(s) play an important role in developing and facilitating innovation uptake.
- The creation of the “ICT and Tourism Platform” could contribute towards improving the access of European stakeholders to data concerning innovation in tourism.
- There is a need to provide economic support for innovative projects.

Received results:

- Improving competitiveness in the tourism sector requires in particular:
 - The consolidation of an economic and social knowledge base and providing access to this database to all stakeholders;
 - Supporting activities aimed at improving innovation and the uptake of modern information and communication technologies in the tourism sector.
- The creation of the Virtual Tourism Observatory as a central source of information and data that should guarantee credibility, consistency, comparability, regular outputs (timeliness and punctuality), accessibility and clarity, will improve companies' and in particular SMEs' access to information.
- The creation of the “ ICT and Tourism Platform” should enable:
 - the identification and dissemination of best practices concerning innovation and ICT in the tourism industry;
 - promoting the significance of innovation and ICT in strengthening tourism competitiveness.
- There is a need to provide economic support for innovative projects.

Informal Meeting of Tourism Ministers in Kraków on 6 October 2011

The Informal Meeting of Ministers for tourism took place on 6 October in Kraków. It was chaired by Mrs. Katarzyna Sobierajska, Under-Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism. The European Commission was represented by Vice-President Antonio Tajani. The meeting was also attended by Ms. Petra Hedorfer, President of the European Travel Commission (ETC).

The discussion was organized around the topic “Promotion of Europe in third countries: strengthening transnational cooperation between the European Commission, Member States (and Candidate Countries) and their National Tourism Organisations, with the cooperation of the European Travel Commission”.

In the interventions Member States:

- stressed the socio-economic importance of the tourism sector and its high potential to contribute to growth and job creation;
- agreed that the promotion of "Destination Europe" would increase the attractiveness of Europe and trigger an increase in the number of inbound tourists from third countries to Europe, especially, in the first stage, from the BRIC countries who are poised to fuel an explosion in international tourism in the coming years;
- generally welcomed the European Commission’s efforts to strengthen the image and visibility of Europe as a destination and the Commission's future cooperation with the European Travel Commission in this field. Some Member States underlined that promotion is a national/regional competence and therefore asked that the Commission's actions be limited to complementing national/regional promotional activities, adding European value and that they respect subsidiarity, especially at a time of budget restrictions;
- emphasized that the promotion of "Destination Europe" should respect the uniqueness of particular tourist destinations and promote the image of Europe as the most diverse set of sustainable and high quality tourist destinations in the world;
- stressed the importance of visas policy for the tourism industry, and called for the removal any possible obstacles to opportunities for the growth of tourism in Europe, related to new emerging markets;

- underlined the importance of macro-regional cooperation in tourism and the economic and social significance of tourism for the global economy and encouraged putting tourism on the agenda of European and international high-level summits.

In his concluding remarks Vice-President Tajani:

- reassured Member States that the Commission will respect their competences and avoid any duplication. The European Commission's actions will add European value and complement the activities of Member States;
- expressed the wish that high representatives from other European institutions (European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee) participate in the future Informal Ministerial Meetings on Tourism.

On behalf the Polish Presidency Mrs. Katarzyna Sobierajska:

- stressed the need that representatives of the European institutions participate in the next Informal Ministerial Meetings on Tourism;
- stressed that the implementation of actions identified in the Commission Communication, in particular measures aimed at improving the visibility of Europe and its promotion, will require adequate financial support at the EU level;
- expressed the hope that funds for tourism will be secured, not only in the short term, but also in the long run under the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020.

At the end of the the Informal Ministerial Meeting, a cooperation agreement was signed by Vice-President Tajani on behalf of the European Commission and Ms. Petra Hedorfer, President of the European Tourism Commission (ETC), providing for the consolidation of joint activities to promote Europe and its destinations in third markets.