

The European Constitution and the 3rd European Forum on tourism: a new impulse for tourism

Franco Ianniello
Tourism Manager
Head Office of Companies for the European Commission

On 29th October the European Constitution was signed in Rome, a historical event for the field of tourism that finally creates real community skills, to demonstrate the fact that its importance, in a global context of European economics, has been recognised at the highest level.

The time available today to go through what has already been done for the promotion of European tourism from the Contogeorgis memorandum in 1982 up until today is not enough, but I must point out that reference to tourism in the treaties has been the subject at the centre of vast discussions during each revision carried out in the last ten years.

The institutional and professional world has always urged the Commission and the Council to create an organic picture for a European policy on tourism.

When the Constitution will be applied, following ratification of the 25 member States, we will finally have a specific legal base that will allow us to recognise tourism with the same visibility as other European powers.

So what will the role of the European Union actually be? To sustain and support member States, that remain as the main actors.

The contents of the Constitutions refers to these objectives in two different articles.

The first refers to the skills of the Union in carrying out support, coordination and completion activities with regards to the member States; the second refers to its capabilities in completing action of the member States in the field of tourism, in particular the promotion of competitiveness in tourism companies.

This task is carried out in two ways: by encouraging the creation of an environment willing to help company development (following the Lisbon strategy) and by promoting cooperation between the member States, through the exchange of good practices.

Currently, and up until the effective date of the Constitution, the European Union will continue to do its job.

Tourism is a horizontal subject that finds space in politics and programmes ranging from structural funds right through to education and training, the environment, transport and research. They are activities and loans that have had very important effects on tourism related activities.

This approach of a horizontal nature requires a high level of coordination that makes the three main elements of a European policy of tourism compatible between member States: an improvement in quality of tourist services, diversification of activities and products and integration of a sustainable and balanced concept of development.

The Commission acts in this way, with three poles of interest placed at the heart of its strategy: developing companies and helping them in their competitiveness, protecting and satisfying the needs of tourists-consumers, protecting the natural and cultural patrimony.

None of this can really be carried out without a real solid partnership between public institutions, private companies, civil companies and destinations.

The main direction towards cooperation and a partnership between all of the operators involved, has been underlined by the Commission in its Communication of 2001 "A cooperation approach for the future of European tourism".

In this Communication the Commission has defined an operative picture of action, aimed at making the very best use of the potential of this field, articulated around 10 measures that range from the very best integration of interests of tourism in European politics and initiatives to strengthening of interaction between operators; from the introduction to the internet of support services for the activation of satellite accounts for tourism; from activation of the Agenda 21 for tourism that can be sustained by quality for destinations and tourist services.

In accordance with this Communication, the internal Market Council, consumers and tourism in May 2002 adopted a Resolution on the future of European tourism that confirms the commitment of the member States

to develop tourism in the European Union in order to allow for the market to face growing competition from extra European destinations.

In order to increase cooperation and consultation within this field, the Council has invited the Commission to organize an annual Forum on tourism.

In mid October, we organized the third European Forum in Budapest during which three main themes were discussed: employment and training in tourism; the internal Market of services of the EU25 and the new trends related to tourism.

Why did we choose these subjects?

Employment, because the contribution of the European tourism industry is essential, but many sectors are characterised by disadvantaged working conditions (due to long and irregular working hours, above average, a high level of atypical work – contracts with a fixed expiry date, at reduced hours, seasonal work, wages and social protection scheme below average) and a high percentage of work on the side; the percentage of qualified personnel is low and a truly European market does not exist due to the lack of trans-frontal recognition of qualifications and skills acquired.

In Budapest we discussed the action necessary to make tourism an attractive market for workers and to make employment in this field much more sustainable: in order to allow this field to take on and maintain sufficiently qualified and motivated personnel and to facilitate the mobility of workers and to control the development of training in the field of tourism.

We discussed the market of services in the light of the recent regulation proposals related to services in the internal market. This regulation was presented with the objective of providing a legal picture that eliminates obstacles from freedom of settlement of service providers and the free circulation of services among member States. This picture should guarantee service providers as well as service receivers a certain level of security that they need in order to carry out these two fundamental freedoms recognised in European treaties. Thanks to this text, service providers related to tourism that have already settled in a member State should therefore make greater use of the supply of services or set up companies in other member States.

Besides reflecting on the action required to eliminate obstacles to free tourist services in the internal market and their impact on the social European model, the role of standards in tourism related services and the role of the tourism industry and of civil organisations in improving these standards in Europe have also been discussed together with the action required in the market of health insurance in order to optimise spa tourism.

With reference to the new trends in tourism, the main challenge for European tourism, its companies and its destinations, is to understand how to handle the growth expected in the next two decades in order to make sure that it can guarantee commercial success. This approach requires a competitive development in terms of quality that takes into consideration the numerous developments in the various forms of tourism and creates substantial benefits on a social and environmental level. The objective of the relative seminar was to present better proposals and practices in order to identify new tourism related trends, for example, the effects of young tourism and senior tourism or low cost transport; to establish the effects of the extension of tourist flows in Europe; to improve accessibility and tourism in Europe.

What were the results of the work groups of the Budapest Forum?

The European Commission and all tourist operators were invited, in the field of services of the internal market, to act in order to complete the elimination of barriers for the free supply of tourist services, in order to strengthen the quality of these services even more, in particular making the organisations and information accessible to everybody, without having to give up the diversities of tourist destinations, which represents one of the main attractions for tourists.

The Commission and States must control and continue to support the development of employment and training in the field of tourism, in order to make tourism a more attractive market for workers in general and in particular for youngsters.

Finally, with regards to new trends related to tourism, the challenge is to control and continue to sustain the development of these new trends in a sustainable manner (economically, socially, culturally and ecologically), to encourage various forms of tourism, such as those related to health, new demographic trends that include the elderly that are much more active, youngsters that enjoy alternative tourism, in order to increase the awareness of the positive impact that tourism, promoted in the right way, may have on life, culture, nature and the economy.

There are quite a few commitments, therefore, that are added onto the other challenger that we are sustaining in other fields, such as the promotion of satellite accounts in order to measure the effective

economic weight of tourism in Europe or the promotion of a web portal as a unique starting point from which to discover all European tourist destinations.

In the immediate future our most important initiative, with regards to the sustainability of tourism, and which I really feel the need to focus your attention on, is the creation of the *Tourism Sustainability Group* (TSG) made up of representatives of the various categories of operators (3 representatives for each member State, 22 for industries, for the civil society, for trade union organisations and for destinations, 3 for international organisations and 1 for the ETC –*European Travel Commission*).

The work carried out by this Group of experts will be crucial for the execution of sustainable tourism in the light of the preparation of a European Agenda 21 for tourism, by the year 2007.

Using this open method of coordination, participants will be called upon to prepare, discuss and present proposals for a detailed picture of actions, with the assignment of specific activities to each operator and a calendar defined for their execution.

The Group will then be called upon to regularly assess the execution of the measures planned, measures that must be aimed at guaranteeing a value to the operators that work the land.

Additional duties may be to promote the use of the Agenda 21 in tourist destinations and to prepare a model for the adoption of control systems and indicators to measure the performance of destinations. Finally, the Group may encourage the development of a *bottom-up* kind of instruments and good examples of sustainable tourism that respect the various local peculiarities that represent European patrimonial and cultural wealth.

This 4th Euromeeting, with its theme "European regions, tourism and sustainable development" is a most suitable venue for the presentation of this new Group which is a another instrument for achieving the objective that now unites us here in Florence: the creation of a common future for high quality tourism, capable of creating wealth and employment but in a sustainable manner, in full compliance with its natural, cultural and human resources.

Thank you for your attention.