

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the correlation between the labour market and regional needs in the area of tourism

(2009/C 200/03)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ISSUES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- recognises that tourism makes a substantial contribution to national GDP in all the Member States, even though its role and benefits as a business activity vary widely between them, in respect both of national finances and of local and regional development;
- acknowledges that the tourist industry faces a series of challenges, first and foremost the economic downturn. In this context, there is a need to boost the tourist industry and support entrepreneurship in this sector, on account of the social dimension of tourism in the sphere of employment and social and regional cohesion;
- underlines that tourism must be developed on a sustainable basis, so that natural resources are not squandered and the environment is not damaged. The natural wealth of an area must be respected, and exploited with a view to the eco-friendly, sustainable development of tourism, the aim being to protect and enhance the environment, safeguard it for future generations, and create conditions for the development of new employment opportunities;

Rapporteur: Konstantinos Tatsis (EL/EPP), President of the Enlarged Prefectural Authority of Drama-Kavala-Xanthi

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. recognises that tourism makes a substantial contribution to national GDP in all the Member States, even though its role and benefits as a business activity vary widely between them, in respect both of national finances and of local and regional development;

2. notes that tourism is a key source of wealth creation for many regional economies, but that to date the Community dimension has been very limited; therefore welcomes the Commission communication 'A renewed EU tourism policy: Towards and Stronger Partnership for European Tourism' and the 'Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism';

3. welcomes the recognition of tourism as an area for complementary EU action in the new Article 195 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Lisbon Treaty) and therefore hopes that the ratification of this Treaty can be achieved as soon as possible in order to provide a sound legal basis for EU activity in this area;

Role of tourism

4. indicates that tourism and the role of the tourism sector are important from many points of view, as they make a significant contribution to the European economy as a whole as well as to the development of the national economies of many Member States and national GDP. At the same time, the growth of tourism — as well as being important for education, health promotion and leisure and recreation activities — has a major impact on employment, with many occupations depending on tourist flows, and many people working in and around tourist facilities;

5. adds that tourism makes a positive contribution to broader social cohesion, providing an opportunity for development and business in the regions, especially those lacking other sources of wealth creation and spreading a part of the profits generated across society. In areas with long-term population decline and economic difficulties, a growing tourism industry can actually be a counterweight that in some cases reverses negative growth and promotes necessary structural change;

6. advocates greater emphasis on the importance of tourism in the process of developing a European social awareness, through the mobility of European citizens. The contribution made by tourism to consolidating this awareness, as citizens get to know and

come into contact with other Member States, other social cultures and different countries, strengthens the feeling of diversity, and at the same time strengthens the feeling of a common outlook. The mobility that the development of tourism in Europe's regions offers to citizens is fundamental to the concept of European citizenship;

7. notes that the development of tourism is directly linked to sectors such as the environment and culture. As regards the environment, there is a pressing need to promote policies for the viable and sustainable development of tourism, in order to use the environment in such a way as to safeguard it. Concerning culture, tourism enables both contemporary cultural production and the wealth of Europe's cultural heritage to be harnessed;

8. emphasises that at regional level, tourism represents a stable source of work, and helps to maintain and reinvigorate employment, contributing significantly to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Lisbon Strategy in the field of strengthening employment;

Challenges facing the tourism industry at regional level

9. acknowledges that the tourist industry faces a series of challenges, first and foremost the economic downturn. In this context, there is a need to boost the tourist industry and support entrepreneurship in this sector, on account of the social dimension of tourism in the sphere of employment and social and regional cohesion;

10. underlines that tourism must be developed on a sustainable basis, so that natural resources are not squandered and the environment is not damaged. The natural wealth of an area must be respected, and exploited with a view to the eco-friendly, sustainable development of tourism, the aim being to protect and enhance the environment, safeguard it for future generations, and create conditions for the development of new employment opportunities;

11. points out that outlines for spatial planning for tourism purposes at regional level are an instrument, designed to strike the right balance between developing business activity and exploiting the natural environment, thereby avoid wasting natural and energy resources in each region. Ceilings have already been imposed in some regions on the number of tourist facilities, and it is proposed to discuss this practice as part of an exchange of best practices. In this connection, the imposition of specific criteria for assessing ceilings is recommended, based on regional development requirements, social needs and the creation of new jobs;

12. indicates that competition in the field of tourism has three aspects. First there is external competition, between national destinations both within and outside the European Union. Then there is internal competition between different European destinations. And lastly, domestic competition between destinations in a single country. Each of these forms of competition has particular features demanding different approaches;

13. points to the additional challenge faced by the regional tourism industry, which is its seasonal nature. Given the nature of the problem, solutions must be sought at regional rather than national level, since the seasonal aspect is linked to specific social and regional factors that have a direct impact on tourist flows. In contrast, multi-faceted development and diversification of the tourism product are possible at national level, tailored to the seasons;

14. recognises that tourism is essentially a service industry, marked by fierce competition and a consumer-driven pursuit of quality. Consequently, the human resources employed in this sector must be of a similarly high quality and properly trained;

15. highlights the need to strengthen businesses operating in the tourism sector, so that they can attract high-level, quality human resources. In this way tourism will generate greater dynamism across Europe and a substantial improvement will be achieved in the services available to visitors, by making European tourist destinations more attractive;

16. points to the need to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises, on the basis of the 'Think Small First' principle set out in the 'Small Business Act'. The tourist sector is made up mainly of SMEs. The legislative framework governing how they operate should therefore be more SME-friendly and direct measures should be taken to protect existing jobs and create new employment opportunities;

Proposals

17. notes that the tourist industry should be reinforced as part of broader European development policy, taking account of the EU's basic development priorities and instruments;

18. proposes that public and private initiatives be implemented, in order to promote greater connectivity, both by air and by sea, between European regions and thus improve mobility for European citizens;

19. draws attention to the fact that, within the framework of sustainable development, the exploitation and protection of the environment form one of the two pillars underpinning development;

20. indicates that the other pillar is to strengthen tourism's social dimension, as part of the drive to protect employment and the need to divide the wealth created by tourism more widely across society;

21. in this connection, proposes initiatives to boost employment in the tourism sector through worker training schemes, initiatives to link tourism and the environment and promote sustainable development of tourism, to step up the introduction of new technologies into the regional tourism product by linking them to culture and commonly provided services, to promote networking between tourist destinations at European level, with a view to protecting the environment, highlighting local produce and upgrading service provision, as well as promoting business practices that contribute to wider social progress and spread wealth across society at local level;

22. notes that existing practices and Community actions, such as the pilot project on social tourism in Europe and the 'Destinations of Excellence' (EDEN) initiative, should be reinforced and should take a more sectoral form; to this end, welcomes the practice of selecting a number of categories each year, and carrying them over on a year-to-year basis, so that the change of content does not cause a break in continuity from one year to another. The European Commission is also urged to take measures to encourage cross-border and interregional cooperation between local and regional authorities with a view to promoting joint tourism products;

23. highlights the need to promote alternative types of tourism, in order to exploit all available opportunities, create new services and promote new products;

24. proposes that a European model for the sustainable development of tourism be designated, on the basis of a programme that would include integrating culture into the tourism product, protecting the environment, promoting the competitiveness of the European tourism product, improving connectivity between regions, both by air and by sea, boosting entrepreneurship, and introducing new technologies;

25. proposes that the role played by CEDEFOP as a link with regional authorities should be strengthened and that it should be asked to continue analysing skills requirements in the tourism sector, based on the needs and aspirations of the regions, so as to enhance employment opportunities and improve the quality of services provided;

26. proposes using European experience with the Local Action Plans for Employment, following the example of the 89 pilot Territorial Employment Pacts, and recommends that plans be drawn up at regional level in collaboration between local and regional authorities, representatives of the hotel, leisure and cultural sectors, representatives of employees in those sectors, and social stakeholders of European alternative tourism, with a view to framing a cohesive policy at regional level for promoting

employment in the tourism sector; recommends that measures based on these plans be eligible for support from the Structural Funds;

27. proposes that measures be taken to temporarily reduce taxes at regional airports so as to boost traffic at those airports and strengthen their direct connection with sources of tourist activity.

Brussels, 22 April 2009.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE
