

# UEAPME's<sup>1</sup> comments on the discussion document "A new framework for the tourism policy in the EU"

## Introduction

UEAPME welcomes the fact that the European Commission takes up the newly obtained competences on tourism policy to strengthen the sector, in which SMEs represent the majority of economic actors. As figures show, tourism is gaining an increasingly important part of economic activity in the European Union, having a significant potential to generate growth and contribute to the development and socioeconomic integration in rural, peripheral or less developed regions. The impact of tourism on the economy in rural areas cannot be underestimated and still has an enormous growth potential. Tourists do not only spend money in specific tourist activities; the local economy as a whole (e.g. convenience stores, rental companies ...) takes advantage of it.

As in the whole of the European economy, the tourism sector has also to adapt to an increasingly number of challenges, to strengthen its attractiveness for EU tourists and avoid losing market share in relation to other regions in the world (emerging markets).

The three main actions proposed by the Commission to focus on are, in UEAPME's opinion, the right ones. However, we would like to submit the following suggestions and additional remarks.

## To stimulate the competitiveness of the tourism industry

The development of the tourist-recreational industry in rural areas is of the utmost importance to create economic growth (impact on convenience stores, innovation in farm and rural tourism, etc.) and employment (in particular for the low skilled).

Innovation in the tourism sector is essential to overcome the number of challenges with which it is confronted, such as how respond to the opportunities created by the use of new communication technologies, new markets (e.g. new client groups such as the elderly or tourists from emerging countries such as China: what are the expectations, how to contact them).

On the other hand, innovation in communication technologies creates opportunities to exchange best practices between SME's in different member states. By creating e-learning platforms, SME organisations can collect and disseminate best practices and SMEs throughout Europe can exchange views on the best way to proceed.

UEAPME regrets the absence of any reference to the need for professionalisation of the sector, which is a key element to secure competitiveness of the tourism industry. This is particular important in rural areas. Professionalisation is not only required in the field of innovation or use of new technologies, but also requires support in the process of commercialisation of these innovative actions (eg. production and commercialisation of recognized local or regional products) and the commercial use of these new technologies.

SMEs have to become more familiar with the existing financial support measures and the existing European financing instruments must target more the tourism sector as a whole. In this way, exchange of best practices and exchange of experiences can be stimulated (e.g. EFRO, Leonardo Da Vinci, PDPO, Leader).

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<sup>1</sup> UEAPME subscribes to the European Commission's Register of Interest Representatives and to the related code of conduct as requested by the European Transparency Initiative. Our ID number is [55820581197-35](#).

In addition, the European Union should raise awareness among Member States on the (negative) impact of raising taxes and other charges on tourist services on the industry's competitiveness.

The extension of the high season is of primordial importance to secure employment in the tourism sector and improve its attractiveness for potential employees and create a stable environment for growth and innovation.

The new competence of the EU introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in the tourism field has recognised the economic importance of the sector for the European economy. As initiative from the Commission in the field of tourism is an opportunity, the necessity to gather market intelligence and improve data availability increases. Gathered data on spending patterns of tourists, economic impact of touristic activity (convenience stores, etc.), employment, best practices and other aspects gain importance. However, this information gathering exercise has to take into account the amount of red tape put on entrepreneurs in the sector and shouldn't raise the administrative burden put on entrepreneurs.

Cooperation with universities, regional / national observatories and exchange of best practices have to support the knowledge base of the sector.

### **To strengthen the development of a sustainable tourism in Europe**

Sustainability is one of the major challenges for the tourism sector. As UEAPME has already stressed in the past, it is of the utmost importance that the sector takes advantage of sustainable tourism in all its aspects<sup>2 3</sup>. The cooperation between entrepreneurs in rural areas will give rise to innovative actions in the field of sustainable tourism.

Supporting the development of e.g. cross-border cycling networks in combination with a network of entrepreneurs delivering customised services is an opportunity to promote sustainable tourism and create economic growth in rural areas. European financial instruments and structural funds could be used to finance the development of cycling networks and tourist-recreative attractions.

### **To promote Europe in the main markets in third countries**

Concerning the branding of "Europe", a study concerning the perception and attractiveness of European countries in the main markets in third countries could give interesting information. In addition, it is important that Europe supports Member States' promotion policies in overseas' markets.

On the other hand measures should be taken to improve convenience of travelling, e.g. the access to EU visas and interconnectivity of modes of transports, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> See UEAPMEs [Position Paper on the Consultation Document 'Basic orientations for the Sustainability of European Tourism](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2003/Positionpaperconsultationdocumenttourism.doc) , August 2003; [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos\\_papers/2003/Positionpaperconsultationdocumenttourism.doc](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2003/Positionpaperconsultationdocumenttourism.doc)

<sup>3</sup> See UEAPMEs press release "Sustainability an opportunity for tourism sector, October 2005, [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/press\\_releases/pr\\_2005/051020\\_SustainableTourism.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/press_releases/pr_2005/051020_SustainableTourism.pdf)