



Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

Europe, the worlds No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe

Comments by **Naturefriends International (NFI)**¹ and the **European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations (EUFED)**²

Ad 1. Introduction

We, the undersigned, as the voices of about 3,3 Million European citizens, very much welcome the initiative of the European Commission to use the new space of manoeuvre created in the Lisbon treaty and take leadership in the development of European tourism. We support the emphasis on concrete European activities that support, coordinate and complement of the work done by the Member States. Innovative tools, flagship projects and best practice exchange can create genuine European added value.

Although we appreciate this positive starting point, Naturefriends International (NFI) and the European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations (EUFED) would like to emphasize that the challenge should not be narrowly defined as staying the world's number one tourism destination, but as **“making Europe the most *sustainable* tourism destination in the world”**. The preservation of natural and cultural heritage and the social well-being of the local population are core aspects in maintaining the attractiveness of holiday destinations. A clear focus on the guiding principle of sustainability, and the development of adequate criteria, are therefore crucial to ensure the long-term economic success and competitiveness of the sector.

¹ Naturefriends International (NFI) is the International umbrella of the Naturefriends Organisations and represents more than 500.000 members. NFI runs more than 1000 Naturefriends houses that serve as basis for social tourism, education centres and starting point for various leisure and holiday activities. The Secretary General of NFI is member of the Tourism Sustainability Group of the Commission.

² EUFED represents the interests, at EU level, of the national Youth Hostel Associations of Europe and the young people who stay at Youth Hostels. EUFED stands for 19 Youth Hostel Associations in 16 European countries, operating 1.787 Youth Hostels across Europe, serving 2,75 million members and achieving more than 22 million overnight stays within Europe yearly. Today, Youth Hostels as the worldwide biggest member association for young people, offer its worldwide 3.5 million members a choice of over 4.000 accommodation centres in 90 countries. EUFED's Operating Director is member of the EU Commissions CALYPSO Expert's Group.

Ad 2.1 Growing economic importance

Tourism is an important source of employment and income. It can play a crucial role in regional economic development, particularly because of the opportunities it provides for small-scale and localized business activities. However, it must also be noted that these benefits are not equally distributed across all groups. For example, wages and career options differ between genders, and there is a lack of information about employment opportunities for disabled people. Also, especially young people are often subject to precarious seasonal contracts and unpredictable incomes. Efforts for a socially sustainable tourism should therefore not only focus on Sustainable Tourism projects like “Calypso”, but also take into account the situation of the employees in the sector.

Ad 3 Challenges and opportunities facing the European Tourism Industry

The Communication draws a rather realistic picture of the challenges caused by demographic trends and climate change. Only a sustainable and high-quality tourism that values natural and cultural diversity can withstand the growing global competition. Strong, reliable sustainable criteria and quality standards are therefore key to making Europe the most sustainable destination in the world.

Key sectors such as winter sports and coastal tourism are highly vulnerable to climate change. At the same time, tourism is a major contributor to the problem. Particularly emissions from air travel have to be significantly reduced. The inclusion of flights into the European Emissions Trading Scheme is an important step in this direction, and should be rendered more effective through more ambitious reduction targets, full auctioning of permits and realistic prices per tonne CO₂. But this alone will not suffice: New form of tourism must be developed, and public awareness for the climate impact of tourism raised. A CO₂-certification scheme would help consumers make more climate-friendly choices and provide incentives to innovative operators. It should comprehensively cover travel, accommodation as well as activities at the destination. Demographic trends will likewise require innovative services that turn specialized demands into economic opportunities.

The role of young people should likewise be considered. Travelling and experiencing other cultures is the key to understanding Europe’s role in a globalized world. This is especially valid considering that five million young people are unemployed today, and that many of them will miss opportunities because they lack the right qualifications or experience. The European Commission’s flagship initiative “Youth on the Move”³ therefore underlines the importance of youth mobility as means towards smarter, sustainable and inclusive growth. High-quality non-formal education programs such as school trips, vocational training and staff exchanges offer an important opportunity to increase low-season travel and provide young people with invaluable educational experiences.

In order to ensure the most effective allocation of funding, tourism-related investments should clearly be directed towards eco-innovation and other forward-thinking solutions to the above-mentioned challenges. Especially projects and measures supported by tax payers’ money – either directly or indirectly, via subventions – should follow concrete sustainability guidelines in order to avoid stranded investment.

³ COM(2010) 477

Ad 4 Ambitious Objectives for a new Action Framework

Naturefriends International and EUFED agree with the need to stimulate the competitiveness and prosperity of European tourism. However, in line with the analyses in chapters 1-3, this should not lead to a one-sided focus on growth, but on increasing the sector's overall quality and sustainability. The 'Madrid declaration' of the European Ministers of Tourism rightfully names 'sustainable competitiveness' as the goal, which should be understood as competitiveness based on the three equal pillars of sustainability. The four priorities identified by the Commission must be seen as closely interlinked aspects of the same overall goal: Making Europe the world's most sustainable tourism destination.

Ad 5.1. Stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector

Promoting diversification of the supply of tourist services

Actions planned: (1) *A European heritage label*

Although we support the diversification of tourism services and very much agree with the focus on natural and cultural heritage, we are very sceptical about the creation of a new label. The IUCN has already developed a well-known system for the protection of natural heritage, cultural heritage and intangible heritage that provides clear criteria and a reliable monitoring system. Instead of doubling these efforts, we suggest building on the marketing potential of the established IUCN frame and fully use it for the promotion of European heritage.

Developing innovations in the tourism industry

Actions planned: (3) *'ICT and tourism' platform*

We agree with the need to foster ICT applications for tourism. European activities should particularly focus on increasing the visibility of sustainable tourism products such as EDEN destinations or eco-labelled accommodation or campsites. The indicators currently developed by the Commission's "Tourism Sustainability Group" can likewise serve as a basis for identifying and promoting such highly sustainable tourism destinations.

Improving professional skills

Actions planned: (5) *promotion of EU education and exchange programmes*

European tourism relies on well-trained, motivated and competent actors on all levels. Not only the entrepreneurs mentioned in the communication, but also managers and other decision-makers need to develop the skills to deal with future challenges and opportunities. We therefore recommend the systematic inclusion of sustainability issues into tourism-related higher education, training and networking programs, particularly in the new EU member states.

Encouraging an extension of the tourism season

We support the actions suggested under these headings, but suggest a widening of the target group for the extension of the seasons. Current provisions under "Calypso" may

create the impression that travel of underprivileged groups should only be promoted off-season. The development of innovative European offers, targeted to specific destinations and open for all during off-seasons would be a sustainable solution.

To achieve this, we recommend a careful evaluation of the first 18 month and the output of the study on “Tourism Exchange in Europe – enhancing employment, extending the seasonality spread, strengthening European Citizenship and improving regional/local economies through the development of social tourism”, the awareness raising conferences and the expert group’s comments.

We suggest to implement a kind of “Calypso Centre of Excellence” which could be responsible for knowledge management networking and further development and integration of the findings in the overall proposed framework of sustainable tourism. Such a “Centre of Excellence” could be delegated to an external partner or the consortium of experts in the field of social and sustainable tourism or also linked to the Tourism Sustainability Group.

Consolidating the socioeconomic knowledge base for tourism

We strongly support the actions suggested under this headline. Data gathering, networks and exchange of experiences can significantly contribute to the knowledge base for addressing future challenges. Research should particularly focus on understanding sustainability challenges involved in tourism, and at the development and testing of innovative solutions.

Ad 5.2 Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism

Actions planned: (11) *indicators for sustainable management of destinations*

We understand this action as referring to the indicators that were developed by the Tourism Sustainability Group and are currently in the testing phase. This action point should therefore read *indicators for sustainable tourism destinations*, as they refer not only to the management of destinations, but also to their overall development and performance.

Actions planned: (12) *awareness-raising campaigns*

Naturefriends International and EUFED very much support the development and implementation of clever campaigns that promote sustainable tourism to different target groups with different travel motivations. They should particularly focus on climate friendly modes of transport. The 500.000 members of Naturefriends International and 1.8 million members of EUFED Europe-wide can play a major role as multipliers for such awareness raising.

Actions planned: (13) *European ‘Qualité Tourisme’ brand*

The future of European tourism relies on the quality of the tourist experience. A ‘*Qualité Tourisme’ brand*, ensuring the transparency and credibility of Europe’s aims to be (come) the world’s most sustainable tourism destination would be a logical consequence of the new European policy framework.

However, rather than creating a new European quality brand we would suggest the **up-grade of the European Eco-Label** (flower) for tourism services and camp sites to an European Sustainability Label for Tourism. This would reflect the growing importance of sustainability for the tourism industry and fulfil consumer demands for fair and sustainable tourism products.

Crucially, such an upgrade should not only include the definition of sustainability criteria, but also the development of guidelines for the necessary change processes. This way, the label would ensure continuous improvements within a long-term perspective.

Actions planned: (14) *Risks of climate change*

In addition to the proposed measures, we suggest **the development of sustainability guidelines for the adaption to climate change** to ensure the development of solutions that are economically successful, environmentally sound and socially responsible in a long-term perspective.

Actions planned: (15) *Charter for sustainable and responsible tourism*

The adoption of a Charter for sustainable and responsible tourism should be a condition for the European Sustainability Label for Tourism “ (compare comments on action 13). The indicators developed in the Tourism Sustainability Group could form one of the bases for the development of such a Charter.

We fully support the planned actions (16) *Strategy for sustainable coastal and marine tourism* and (17) *Strengthen the cooperation with and promotion of sustainable tourism to emerging countries*. However, we would like to highlight the importance of concrete tools, in particular to address the ‘hot-spots’ of low sustainability in European coastal and marine destinations. This should include measures and responsibilities for turning mass tourism in coastal areas into more environmentally and socially benign forms.

Ad 5.3 Consolidating the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality tourist destinations

We support the aim of promoting Europe as the world’s most sustainable tourism destination. However, such an image must be based on tangible action rather than a mere marketing exercise. Rather than presenting Europe as a “collection of sustainable and high-quality tourism destinations”, the aim must be to develop an overall approach to tourism that promotes innovation, quality and sustainability across the entire sector.

Actions planned: (19) *Promoting the visiteurope.com website*

While we agree that the visiteurope.com website could become an important tool in promoting sustainable European tourism (see also comments on action 3), the current website does not yet reflect this image. A substantial upgrading is needed to render the site more modern and interactive, with adequate room given particularly to sustainability as the core basis for European tourism development.

Ad 5.4 Maximise the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism

Naturefriends International and EUFED agree with the importance of the EU's financial policies and instruments, especially the ERDF, ESF and the EAFRD, for the sustainable development of tourism. These funds name sustainable development as one of their priorities, but lack concrete quality criteria for sustainability. We therefore suggest the creation of a **high-level expert group for the development of sustainability criteria for EU-funded tourism projects**, including the relevant departments of the European Commission as well as business and NGO stakeholders (for example represented by the Tourism Sustainability Group.) Member states should likewise participate in this group, and be motivated to implement the results also in their national funding programmes.

Successful programs such as EDEN and 'Networking for a sustainable and competitive tourism' should be continued in order to ensure their long-term effectiveness.

Conclusion:

"European tourism policy needs a new impetus."

Naturefriends International and EUFED welcome the Commission's plans for a concrete action program to develop the sustainability and competitiveness of European tourism. Tailor-made services that respect the environment, local communities and cultural diversity send a strong signal to visitors as well as citizens by putting European values into concrete practice.

Such a development needs strong partners and a multi-stakeholder approach. Therefore we suggest **continuing with the successful work of the Tourism Sustainability Group**. As a tested sources of stakeholder expertise in this area, it should be **closely involved in the further development and implementation of the strategy at all stages**. A **clearly defined role for the TSG in the monitoring, support and evaluation of the program and activities** would make an important contribution to the overall quality and effectiveness of the program.

Summary:

A sustainable European tourism strategy creates added value

- for consumers, by inspiring new forms of high-quality tourism that create memorable experiences and learning opportunities and promote European citizenship
- for the tourism industry, by facilitating genuinely European research, networking and information exchange, and thus securing the basis for competitive offers that meet economic, environmental and social standards at the highest possible level
- for European destinations, by developing a tourism that protects local communities, knowledge and culture while sharing their beauty with the wider public

Naturefriends International and EUFED are convinced that Europe can become the most sustainable tourism destination in the world. Ambitious programs and criteria can secure Europe a lead role in the development of innovative, high quality mobility. To fully explore this potential, the European Commission should

1. protect the rights particularly of young people and women employed in the tourism sector, ensuring fair working conditions and adequate social security
2. improve EU statistics to gain a better understanding of the situation of employees with disabilities in the tourism sector
3. develop a CO2-certification scheme for tourism offers to facilitate consumer choice and provide incentives for innovative operators
4. continuously analyze demographic change and related tourism patterns in order to identify new trends and challenges early
5. support youth mobility by expanding the possibilities for exchanges and experiences abroad in school curricula, study programs and vocational training
6. give each child the possibility to go on a school trip, based on high-quality criteria of Education for Sustainable Development
7. coordinate holiday schedules of Member States
8. monitor the development of sustainable youth tourism, especially regarding obstacles to travel for young people
9. eradicate barriers linked to visa regimes
10. define sustainable competitiveness as based on the three equal pillars of sustainability, and establish high-quality criteria for a smart green growth
11. promote the wealth of European heritage based on the high-quality criteria developed in the IUCN heritage label
12. increase the use of ICT in tourism development,
13. integrate sustainability issues into the full range of tourism-related EU education, training and networking programmes
14. expand the target group for off-season tourism related to the CALYPSO preparatory action
15. develop a "Calypso Centre of Excellence"

16. apply and further develop the Tourism Sustainability Group's indicators for sustainable tourism destinations, taking them as a starting point for the European Sustainable Tourism Charta and the European Sustainability Label for tourism.
17. implement clever and innovative awareness-raising campaigns highlighting the European added value of sustainable tourism
18. up-grade the European Eco-Label (flower) for tourism services and camp sites to an European Sustainability Label for Tourism
19. development sustainability guidelines for the adaption to climate change
20. promote a European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism
21. highlight 'hot-spots' of low sustainability in European coastal and marine destinations and develop measures for turning the mass tourism in coastal areas into more environmentally and socially benign forms
22. ensure the vision of a sustainable European tourism is reflected not only in marketing but also in practical substance
23. upgrade and restructure the visiteurope.com web-portal to reflect the European priority on sustainable and high-quality tourism
24. establish a high-level expert group to develop sustainability criteria for EU-funded tourism projects
25. continue the successful advisory work of the Tourism Sustainability Group and strengthen its role by giving it a concrete role in the development, support and evaluation of the EU tourism policy and action plan

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