

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Tourism policy in the enlarged EU

(2005/C 255/02)

On 1 July 2004 the European Economic and Social Committee decided to draw up opinion, under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, on *Tourism policy in the enlarged EU*

The Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 March 2005. The rapporteur was Mr Mendoza.

At its 416th plenary session held on 6 and 7 April 2005 (meeting of 6 April 2005), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 83 votes to four with five abstentions.

1. Background

1.1 As part of the EESC's ongoing efforts to finalise its position and put forward proposals to the tourism sector, it is drawing up an opinion to take account of the new situation in the enlarged EU, both as it is now and as it may develop over the next few years.

1.2 The EESC has already drawn up opinions on a range of tourism-related topics, but this will be its first examination of the impact on the tourism sector and its prospects in this new European context. Most importantly, it will also be the first time that members from the new Member States have been involved in the work.

1.3 Without wishing to cast doubts upon or disregard the work of previous opinions, it is not certain what kinds of threats and opportunities these new prospects open up, be it for the whole of Europe, for individual countries, for pre-enlargement Member States or for the new Member States.

1.4 In drawing up this opinion, we have tried to be completely open to information, considerations and suggestions from the new Member States, whilst noting the views already expressed by the Committee. At the hearing held in Katowice, Poland, the Committee heard numerous important contributions from old and new EU Member States alike, all of which consider tourism a source of economic and cultural benefit, that contributes to the construction of a Citizens' Europe and therefore to European integration. This is all the more important and necessary during an ongoing enlargement process that calls for even greater efforts to bring the Union closer to its citizens and to foster mutual understanding between cultures and peoples. In the near future, the drive to achieve European integration will be speeded up as it is essential for the new EU members. People who travel as tourists are without doubt in the vanguard of European integration.

1.5 This opinion does not attempt to go into great detail on the current situation or on future prospects for the tourism industry in each country but to look at the common elements

of a future European tourism policy and to examine and propose measures that will help to ensure that tourism is a significant driving force for economic and social development for all countries, and which also meets the criteria for sustainability.

1.6 The European Constitution is a new factor that must be taken into account in any analysis of relations between the Member States themselves and between these countries and the European institutions. This opinion attempts to diagnose how enlargement affects tourism as a whole and how the new framework provided by the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe might help or hinder this outstanding contributor to development that is tourism in Europe and throughout the world. In short, it sets out to analyse the factors that might shape European tourism policy.

1.7 It is in relations between the various peoples of Europe, between the citizens of this political, economic and social entity that is Europe, that we find one of the best ways in which tourism can contribute to a greater understanding between all peoples and consequently to the construction, cohesion and consolidation of the new Europe.

1.8 We must bear in mind that tourism is currently going through a hard time, due to various factors, including international terrorism and consequently the need to reconcile security with freedom, and also the world economic crisis and its impact on people's desire for travel, at least for long-distance travel. Tourism is an instrument for world peace, and can continue to be so in the future.

1.9 Global, and in particular European, tourism must be based on the development of the real cultural values of both sending and receiving countries and help to shape these values. The exchange of customs and cultures, mutual respect, appreciation for the diverse environmental, heritage and social characteristics of each locality, can and must contribute to a united Europe and a world where countries support and respect each other.

2. Tourism policy in the European Union

2.1 *Points for general discussion of future tourism policy in the enlarged EU.*

2.1.1 Tourism policy in the European Union and the European Constitution: Although tourism does not as such form part of EU common policy, some European institutions nevertheless put forward measures and actions which, because of their cross-sectoral nature, have an impact on tourism or use it as an instrument to achieve some of the EU's fundamental aims, such as sustainable development, employment and economic and social cohesion; in short, to provide a better quality of life for Europe's citizens.

2.1.2 Section 4 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, entitled Tourism (Article III-281) sets out its position on tourism:

'1. The Union shall complement the action of the Member States in the tourism sector, in particular by promoting the competitiveness of Union undertakings in that sector.

To that end, Union action shall be aimed at:

- (a) encouraging the creation of a favourable environment for the development of undertakings in this sector;
- (b) promoting cooperation between the Member States, particularly by the exchange of good practice.

2. European laws or framework laws shall establish specific measures to complement actions within the Member States to achieve the objectives referred to in this Article, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.'

2.1.2.1 Article I-17 includes tourism in its areas of supporting, coordinating or complementary action:

'The Union shall have competence to carry out supporting, coordinating or complementary action. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be:

- (a) protection and improvement of human health;
- (b) industry;
- (c) culture;
- (d) tourism;
- (e) education, youth, sport and vocational training;
- (f) civil protection;
- (g) administrative cooperation.'

2.1.3 These Treaty articles show that, although the economic nature of tourism and its potential to generate

wealth through businesses is recognised, there is no suggestion of a move towards European harmonisation in this area. The intention is simply to acknowledge that it has a role to play in complementing and coordinating national policies. Furthermore, the desire to exclude any regulatory activity that could be used to harmonise these policies is made quite clear. This, in the opinion of the EESC, does not exclude but indeed facilitates agreement on identifying the values that define a European tourism model.

2.1.3.1 The Treaty could possibly have set out more interventionist models for tourism, but a reading and analysis of the proposed text, reveals a generally positive line, in harmony with the rest of the constitutional text. The section on tourism in the Treaty enables us to continue trying to achieve the main objectives as regards the role of tourism and how to improve it. On this basis, the EESC will continue working in the future with other institutions and stakeholders in the sector.

2.1.4 The aim of this Opinion is not to set out and analyse each of the policies developed by the different countries of the Union and compare models: those more or less integrated into a European framework; those more or less 'nationalist'; diversity within European tourism, etc. As already noted in a Committee opinion, tourism starts with the local and regional dimension, and from there, spreads to the national and international stage. The beneficial and fruitful hearing in Katowice, revealed not only the diversity of tourism activity in each Member State, but also the range of strategies that each State, region and local community could use to promote their tourism model both now and in the future.

2.1.5 Nor is the aim of this opinion to make judgements on this range of models for action, although it is clear that some are more open than others to cooperation at whatever level, while others opt exclusively for competition in a free market.

2.2 *Enlargement and tourism: The effect of EU enlargement on the industry.*

2.2.1 The enlargement of the European Union is a new situation which is certainly going to bring new opportunities to the whole of Europe and clearly also to each old, new and future Member State.

This opportunity can be seen from various standpoints:

2.2.1.1 Supply: It is clear that enlargement is greatly increasing the already large range of European tourism products, not only in terms of the number of tourist locations, but also and possibly more importantly, in terms of cultural, heritage and environmental added value. Here it is necessary to refer once more to the hearing in Katowice, where this expansion of product range brought about by the new Member

States became clear through the various natural, cultural and even industrial tourism initiatives that were presented. Without doubt this expansion will make the European industry more competitive, both internally and with other countries of America, Asia and the rest of the world. The new Member States are also seeking to increase their range of tourist products as a key factor in the development of their tourism industry and, ultimately, their economy. Although this desire for growth is absolutely legitimate and advisable, it should not be forgotten that growth has its limits and that the speed of growth must be sustainable to ensure that social, economic and environmental values are safeguarded in the future. Other Member States' experience of tourism development, with its failures and successes, should serve as an example of prudence and success in choosing a model for the development of new tourist destinations.

2.2.1.2 Demand: The increase in tourism demand associated with enlargement is undoubtedly triggered by three key factors. Firstly, the increased number of EU citizens wanting or needing to travel to other places and other countries of the EU which until now were difficult to get to, either because the individual was not part of the Community and so had difficulty travelling, or because they were an EU citizen and had difficulties travelling to other countries outside of the EU. Secondly, the higher standard of living that will certainly be reached in the new countries will increase peoples' desire to travel. Lastly, it is hoped that the new and improved transport and communication infrastructures will serve as an incentive for travel and tourism, for relocation for professional or personal reasons and in short, that travel and the associated tourism industry will grow.

2.2.1.3 Market: As a consequence of the increase in supply and demand due to EU enlargement, the tourism market will grow bigger and stronger. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on all economic activity of the EU, where tourism is a very influential industry. It is difficult to predict the impact that enlargement of the market will have on prices of tourism products, the products themselves or companies' profits, but everything seems to indicate that the positive effects will outweigh the negative. The enlarged market will certainly increase competition, but in order that the positive effects have a snowball effect, the increase in competition will have to be based on an improvement in the competitiveness of businesses and of Europe's tourist destinations.

2.2.2 However, in order to create a strong industry from the new and great opportunity provided by enlargement, various principles, conditions and common rules that ensure the general viability of the activity, as well as its socially desirable future, must be adhered to. These criteria were defined at the Lisbon Summit, where a Strategy was mapped out on the basis of the following objectives: sustainability, a knowledge-based society, employment and social cohesion.

2.2.2.1 Sustainability: In a previous opinion on *Socially sustainable tourism for everyone* ⁽¹⁾, the EESC, like other international and European institutions such as: the Commission, the Parliament, etc., described the sustainability of European tourism as invaluable to its balanced and productive long-term economic development. The 100 initiatives set out in this opinion present a specific range of factors that help to achieve sustainability.

The growth in tourism will tempt the new countries to expand their tourism industry. The scale and speed of this expansion must be managed in such a way that it is economically, socially and environmentally acceptable. The demand for sustainability in tourism activities is not easy to meet, since contradictions continually arise and the criteria for applying sustainability differ according to the players involved.

2.2.2.2 A knowledge-based society: Tourism can contribute very constructively to achieving this Lisbon Strategy objective, due to the very nature of the activity, based on cultural exchange, travelling to other places and bringing different social and cultural customs and realities closer together. In particular, the acquisition of knowledge by young people is greatly stimulated when they travel, when they live with other people from other environments, when they become more open, tolerant and caring. The acquisition of knowledge is not only a question of academic study but also of gaining experience; this can be done in any circumstances, at any age and tourism provides a perfect opportunity for this.

Information and communication technologies are key contributors to both the creation and consumption of tourist products, and they will certainly help to make tourism a competitive industry accessible to all.

2.2.2.3 Employment: The Lisbon Strategy stated that Europe should take the lead in creating more and better jobs over the next few years. There can be no doubt that tourism, which accounts for 5 % of European GDP and employment — up to 10 % in some Member States — can be a source of more and better jobs in an enlarged Europe. For this to be socially sustainable, both old and newly created jobs in the tourism sector must fulfil the basic requirements of quality, specific training, stability and, in particular, recognition of the rights of workers employed part-time or on a temporary basis.

2.2.2.4 Social cohesion: Tourism is a powerful force for cohesion, enabling us to get to know other people and places, and therefore helping to give substance to the concept of citizenship in the enlarged Europe. To be able to share common goals with others, it is essential to know about them and tourism facilitates this. Tourism, will further progress in the enlarged Europe by improving cohesion between all the peoples of Europe.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 32 of 5.2.2004

3. General analysis of tourism policy in the enlarged Europe

3.1 The key question that we can and should ask is: Can tourism policy be covered by the general development of a comprehensive industrial and economic policy for the European Union? We know that the answer must be and is affirmative, if by tourism policy we understand all the criteria, objectives and instruments capable of steering European tourism towards satisfactory levels of competitiveness, wealth creation and sustainability. The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe thus states that actions in this sector shall support, coordinate and be complementary to other European policies.

3.2 Features of industrial policy applicable to the tourism sector. Some of the features of tourism policy that can be drawn from Europe's general industrial and economic policies are:

3.2.1 Employment and Social Policy: Aside from the very specific features of jobs in tourism due to its highly seasonal nature, all EU employment policies are perfectly applicable to employment in the tourism sector. That said, all additional initiatives to reduce seasonality should not only be welcomed but also encouraged and fostered by the EU institutions. There is still a lot of work to be done on this issue, since seasonal employment is still considered normal in the main tourism areas. The staggering of holiday dates could make a positive contribution to prolonging the season and therefore enable better use of the capacity of tourism infrastructures.

3.2.2 Quality: In the same way, Community policies to promote quality and to introduce quality benchmarks in industry must be applied in the tourism sector and lead to improved quality. Due to its very nature as a service industry and its core tenet of personal service tourism, is very sensitive to this variable. The efforts of all European tourism players in promoting quality should be supported, coordinated and complemented, as stated in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

3.2.3 Research and development: Tourism in particular is undergoing major structural change in the way in which services are advertised and purchased via the internet, and the positive impact that this will have on tourism should be studied and promoted. R&D work on tourism should be the responsibility of all institutions at all levels and all businesses.

3.2.4 Consumer protection: Tourism is an economic activity in which there is a strong interrelationship between service providers and consumers. All general EU consumer

protection policy must be applied directly to the tourism sector and increase business and consumer responsibility. The promotion and distribution of quality labels and eco-labels must be supported and encouraged in the tourism sector.

3.2.5 Environmental protection: All European environmental protection policies are applicable to and benefit the tourism industry. If tourism is fundamentally an industry based on the rational use of natural resources, all initiatives, activities and regulations can only encourage tourism today and in the future.

3.2.6 Other EU policies: In general, and due to its cross-sectoral nature, the tourism industry is affected by all of the EU's economic and industrial policies. However, the strategic importance of tourism to employment and social cohesion should be recognised in the institutions; policies should be applied appropriately on the basis of studies and pilot projects.

3.2.6.1 In short, the tourism policy of the enlarged EU, as set out in the European Constitution when it comes into force in due course, should be a policy of support and coordination, and complement all other EU tourism-related policies. The competitiveness of businesses, sustainability in its broadest sense, the creation of high quality employment, infrastructure policy, etc. should all focus on tourism as a key activity for the development of the whole Union.

3.2.7 Relation to other activities: Tourism acts as a catalyst to boost the effects of other activities, such as sport, as analysed by the EESC in its opinion on *Tourism and sport: the future challenges for Europe* ⁽²⁾.

3.3 *The status of tourism policy in the EU.* The question as to whether tourism in Europe and in EU policy is truly accorded the role, importance and strategic position that it merits as a human, economic and social activity, can be answered from various points of view.

3.3.1 The EU, its countries, regions and cities are world tourist destinations: the new situation in Europe, together with the accession of the new Member States, has resulted in a wide-ranging and diverse product range, full of contrasts, enabling Europe to develop into a pre-eminent tourist source and destination. In the future, expectations are for continued, more modest growth, but with higher expectations than other industries. A policy of quality — the linchpin of competitiveness and sustainability — must underpin this product range; the development of a European quality tourism mark or marks should be the means whereby this quality is achieved and expressed.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 157 of 28.6.2005

3.3.2 Institutional measures that would have to be adopted in order to develop a tourism policy for Europe as a whole.

3.3.2.1 It is acknowledged that the European institutions, including the Commission and the Parliament, are carrying out ongoing work to coordinate measures impacting on tourism. The *European Tourism Forum* initiative, which has already been implemented, should be noted. This annual meeting brings together all players in the tourism sector and is of great scientific value — as well as of value for planning and cooperation policy — for the improvement of European tourism.

3.3.2.2 This and other work to promote awareness of European tourism with the participation of all the sector's players, is very positive. The conclusions of the Forum held in Budapest in 2004 are to be found in Appendix 1.

3.3.2.3 Here it is worth mentioning again the EESC initiative presented in the opinion on *Tourism policy and public-private cooperation* ⁽³⁾, proposing that the Commission analyse the possibility of creating a European Tourist Board, in either the medium or long term.

3.3.2.4 This Board could comprise a wide range of institutional officials and private players, in particular social partners and civil society organisations, and would analyse tourism information, propose guidelines and follow up agreements reached in the European Tourism Forum. The EESC will cooperate and participate actively in its creation.

3.3.2.5 The EESC wishes to express its determination to continue working on this issue, on its own behalf and in cooperation with the Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and other institutions, to boost the profile and development of European tourism.

3.3.2.6 To aid progress in this area, it is proposed that more use be made of institutional meetings to analyse, coordinate and promote the application of the Resolutions of the European Tourism Forums.

3.4 Features of a tourism policy for the enlarged EU

3.4.1 The current opinion is intended to be consistent with the EESC's previous opinion, *Socially sustainable tourism for everyone* ⁽⁴⁾, adapting the principles that shape tourism policy to the new European situation. In this case tourism policy is not seen as a set of regulatory powers for the Union but as principles and values that must be borne in mind and must imbue tourism measures adopted by all public institutions at all levels,

as well as the business activities of the private sector. Below is a list of those elements which, when taken as a whole, shape this system of guiding values that can contribute to improving tourism and to ensuring its sustainability.

3.4.2 The definition of tourism in the enlarged Europe must be based on values identified in European tradition and culture, and have the tourist him/herself at its heart. The idea of the tourist as a consumer of services that are complex, varied and profoundly personal in nature and composition cannot be abandoned. But the fundamentally economic and commercial nature of tourism, which necessitates the application of the principles of profitability and competitiveness in this economically influential industry and substantial contributor to Europe's GDP, cannot be forgotten either.

3.4.3 The tourism policy of the enlarged Europe should be based on sustainability, both in its wider sense, as an instrument of economic, social and environmental development — but development subject to stricter conditions. One of the most important issues to debate in this area concerns limits to growth. Have objective and quantifiable limits been set for tourism? Have economic limits been set on the pace of developing tourist destinations throughout the world?

3.4.3.1 The answers to these questions are not simple ones, but the idea of limits to growth — but not to development provided it is balanced, sustainable development — seems to be gaining ground. It might be worth quoting the example of the Mediterranean, where the number of tourist locations is increasing, a development that poses a serious threat to the entire tourist industry in the medium term and to its profitability. Tourism investment initiatives, subject to sustainable development conditions and in cooperation with the southern Mediterranean countries, must be welcomed as instruments for the economic and social development of a vast and currently underdeveloped geographical area.

3.4.4 The adaptation of the tourism industry to a changing situation to improve its competitiveness: R+D, new technologies, investment, promotion, design, marketing, networks, business associations, etc. is a requirement for all European businesses, particularly those that want to find a niche in the newly enlarged Europe. The role played by the internet today and the role it will foreseeably play in future must convince all sectors that the way forward is to be involved in its development, in using the internet to improve productivity, for research and ultimately to ensure that the tourism industry's development is more balanced.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 74 of 23.3.2005

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 32 of 5.2.2004

3.4.5 **Tourism and Employment:** Labour relations, vocational training and promotion, specialisation, social protection, free movement of workers, etc. are key factors in the shaping of a tourism policy of the enlarged Europe. Particular attention must be paid to creating and training the new professions in the tourism sector; the institutions must be involved in this to ensure that the criteria of creating of high-quality jobs are met. Furthermore, the range of tourism qualifications should be expanded and improved.

3.4.6 **Tourism in relation to the promotion of European culture and heritage:** customs, art, architecture, history, folklore, gastronomy, etc. should all play a very important role in an appropriate European tourism policy. The new countries, with a rich heritage to add to the range of tourism products, will have to base their tourism development on these values. Experiences like those of the *paradores* in Spain, the *pousadas* in Portugal and the *ville e castelli* in Italy among others, can serve as good examples of integration between heritage and tourism underpinned by commercial promotion.

3.4.7 **Access to tourism for all** is a challenge that should not be ducked. Tourism is every individual's right, even if they suffer from disability: a campaign to encourage tourism in the enlarged Europe is proposed, aimed particularly at schoolchildren and adolescents and at older or retired people and pensioners.

3.4.8 **The growth of the tourism market in the wake of enlargement** must act as a driving force for internal European tourism and consequently as a basis for a general promotional policy.

3.4.8.1 Given the special significance of internal tourism and its effects on internal demand and consumption in the EU, particularly the current and potential importance of social tourism, the EESC will draft an opinion on a **Social Tourism Policy for Europe**.

3.4.9 **Stakeholders in the tourism sector** must take a leading role in the analysis, design, monitoring and evaluation of tourism policies in various fields. This must be the *modus operandi* at all times, a principle to be adhered to in any tourism policy. Cooperation strategies and methods of participation should be agreed between bodies.

3.4.10 **The seasonality of tourism** is possibly its biggest weakness; the pursuit of stable employment and activity must be at the heart of a new tourism policy for the enlarged Europe. Methods of compensating for the under-use of human resources and capital due to seasonality should be researched

through pilot projects. This research should explore fully the changing tourism models and how to ensure tourism remains a significant instrument of development.

3.4.11 The diverse situation of European islands merits special attention. Some of the very characteristics that provide them with the right conditions for tourism development can have huge repercussions. The communication, transport and regional development policies are of strategic importance to these islands and to mountainous areas, due to the effect their specific characteristics can have on tourism.

3.4.12 Once more, it is important to emphasise that, in today's world, security and prevention are at the heart of tourism development. In the case of both natural and man-made disasters, prevention through rules that ensure people's freedom to travel and move about should be a key factor in tourism development.

3.4.13 It should not be forgotten that a tourism policy for the enlarged Europe must contribute effectively to helping tourism fulfil the role it can play in accelerating the process of social, economic and political cohesion in the EU, through various actions:

- deepening knowledge of countries, people and cultures,
- contributing to the creation of a European model of co-existence, peace and progress,
- promoting a positive image of Europe in the world.

3.5 *The role of public-private partnership in developing tourism*

This opinion is intended to be consistent with the EESC's previous opinion *Tourism policy and public-private cooperation* ⁽⁵⁾ and examine effective ways of achieving cooperation.

3.5.1 When applied to an analysis of the enlarged Europe and tourism, appropriate coordination and cooperation between the public and private sectors must be considered not only at local and national level, but can — and probably should — go beyond these barriers; cooperation must also be a vector for transmitting sustainable policies and measures to improve investment and competition from one country to another. Countries and social sectors with longer traditions of tourism can offer the benefit of their experience to the countries that form the enlarged Europe, helping them to avoid mistakes in developing tourism models, providing concrete experience of successes and failures; in short, working together on this new model of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable tourism.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 74 of 23.3.2005

3.5.2 Training must be one of the cornerstones of improving the quality of tourism, but it is advisable that its contents meet the real demand of the different tour operators; this should make institutional efforts more effective. Public-private cooperation can and should play a vital role in this area.

3.5.2.1 The EESC wishes to state that it would fully support the initiative creating a European Masters Degree in Tourism; this would help to shape, develop and apply the European tourism model, based on the values of the European Union as an area of co-existence and economic development.

3.5.3 The European tourism policy should ensure the promotion of networks of tour operators, as well as of business associations at all levels: local, regional, national and European.

3.5.4 The role of transport infrastructure in the enlarged Europe is crucial to ensuring that competition remains central to the development of tourism in all countries. The Union must make efforts in this field to guarantee safe, swift and high-quality access and intermodality of transport for all regions, bearing in mind that the use of infrastructures for tourism has a greater economic and social impact. Particular priority must be attached to the accessibility of the islands of EU countries in policies to improve internal and external communications.

3.6 European institutional cooperation

3.6.1 European institutional cooperation can take many forms:

3.6.1.1 *Pilot projects:* For example, the European Social Tourism Project, that could contribute substantially to the growth of internal tourism and to ensuring access to tourism for all, as well as help in overcoming the seasonality of tourism. The project should possibly be promoted by various countries with similar successful experiences, together with the Commission, and should investigate the long-term viability of the global European Social Tourism Project. It is proposed that the European Commission analyse the possible impact of a European Social Tourism Project on the European tourist industry.

3.6.1.2 *Cooperation on research:* For example, into new forms of tourism, in particular tourism compatible with sustainability, which could be given a boost by enlargement. It is proposed that the Commission consider carrying out an investigative study on this subject, to which the EESC would contribute.

3.6.1.3 Cooperation and exchange with other areas of Europe and the world.

The main features and conditions of the European model of tourism are described throughout this opinion and must influence the definition of other tourism products from outside of Europe, above all to prevent these from competing unfairly and disregarding tourism standards. International standards, criteria for correct financial management, human — especially labour and social — rights and environmental sustainability must all be respected. The EESC proposes that the EU develop a European tourism model with different international institutions: the ILO and the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS).

3.6.2 The role of the Structural Funds and other forms of support in tourism in an enlarged EU

3.6.2.1 EU economic solidarity is best reflected in its policy of economic and social cohesion, implemented through the Structural Funds. This policy, which has proved an effective tool for progress, will be particularly relevant with enlargement. This is why actions which have a positive effect on the development of cohesion policies should be supported through the development of a tourism policy. These policies can in their turn boost tourism activity in all countries, so that tourism can exercise a multiplier effect on such actions. Cross-border measures can help to create tourism products shared by various countries, through common actions and products.

3.6.2.2 To explore this issue further, the Committee proposes that a study be carried out on the effect of the Structural Funds on the tourism sector.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Tourism is a key economic sector and industry for the effective construction of an enlarged Europe, which should grow with due respect for sustainability in the broadest sense and should contribute effectively to European social cohesion.

4.2 The new Member States see tourism as a great opportunity for economic development that can bridge the gap, in terms of income, between them and the old European Union countries. The great variety that they bring in terms of culture, heritage and nature will mean an expansion both of the product range and of internal and external tourism demand.

4.3 An enlargement taking in other countries will have a very positive impact on the future of the tourism sector, particularly if the European model of tourism is applied with due respect for sustainability.

4.4 One of the proposals that the Committee would like to see approved and forwarded to all Member State institutions is to mount a wide-ranging education and motivation campaign based on the concept of tourism as an industry of strategic importance for Europe. This campaign would essentially target school children, with the aim of teaching them to value tourism as a human activity that involves getting to know people, places and cultures, which can be of vital importance to their own personal growth and enrichment. This campaign should involve European, national, regional and local institutions, as well as business organisations and unions from all sectors, and should invite pupils to learn about their nearest tourist attractions (city, province, region) as a means of motivating them to travel in their own country and discover the delights of the rest of Europe.

4.5 Creating a database of good tourism practice, covering destinations and private operators such as hotel owners, tour operators and additional offers etc., could provide a means for exchanging positive experiences from which the newly integrated countries and those yet to join will certainly benefit greatly.

4.6 By the same token, creating and encouraging various networks of destinations which aim to promote the best values of sustainability and quality will ensure that tourism develops on the basis of criteria geared to a new model of European tourism guaranteeing greater continuity.

4.7 Consumer protection should be at the heart of a European Tourism Model intended to continually generate sustainable economic activity. All general consumer protection policy should be applied to tourism, mainly because of the strong consumer — service provider relationship found in this sector.

4.8 The Committee welcomes the Commission's initiative to carry out a study of the effects of sporting events on tourism, based on the EESC opinion on **Tourism and sport: the future challenges for Europe**.

4.9 In order to find reference points and bases for future actions in support of European tourism, the EESC calls on the Commission to carry out, within a reasonable timespan, studies on tourism and the situation of social tourism, as well as on tourism for people with disabilities, given its social importance and possible positive effects on tourist activity.

4.10 The EESC would like to reiterate two particular proposals already set out in this opinion:

— Firstly, to welcome the creation of the Commission's group on Tourism and Sustainability, within which the EESC will be represented, to continue working towards the possible future setting-up of a European Tourism Board and to encourage meetings between European institutions, social partners and other civil society organisations. The Committee considers that both initiatives will help to achieve the objectives laid down in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

— Secondly, to express the EESC's willingness to cooperate with other international institutions concerned with the tourism sector, such as the ILO and the BITS.

5. The EESC has decided to publish and distribute this opinion under the title the 'Katowice Declaration on Tourism Policy in the enlarged EU' and that it should be the Committee's contribution to World Tourism Day 2005, organised by the World Tourism Organisation.

Brussels, 6 April 2005.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Anne-Marie SIGMUND