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EU-Communication “Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe” – comments and proposals from the perspective of the EUSBSR-Priority Area Tourism

With its communication on tourism, adopted on June 30, 2010, the European Commission makes a further step to a new EU tourism policy framework. According to Art. 195 TFEU, tourism has become a new EU internal policy through which the EU shall complement and add value to the actions of the member states, in particular by promoting the competitiveness of the tourism sector and the cooperation between the Member States, especially by the exchange of good practice.

The underlying communication investigates in the opportunities and the challenges of the European tourism sector. A set of 21 actions is defined, grouped under the following four priorities:

1. Stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector;
2. Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism;
3. Consolidate the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high quality destinations;
4. Maximize the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism.

Along this baseline, the proposals of the European Commission are commented from the perspective of the Priority Area Tourism (PA Tourism) as it has been defined in the action plan of the EU-Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Reference is also being made to ongoing initiatives and projects in the Baltic Sea region (BSR) that deal with issues mentioned in the EU communication. The present statement builds on the contribution that the Priority Area Coordinator for tourism sent to the Commission in reply to its discussion document “A new framework for the tourism policy in the EU” on March 24, 2010.

Ad 1. Stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector

Promoting diversification of the supply of tourist services

The focus of this objective is to give European tourism a higher profile through the development of thematic tourism products on a transnational level. The European heritage in the broad sense of the word is seen as a common denominator for these products. The promotion of the cultural heritage and natural landscapes is also at the heart of flagship project (FP) 12.7 of PA Tourism. In a first step, the Marshal’s Office of Pomorskie and the Pomorskie Tourist Board, that act as lead partner (LP) of this FP, map ongoing initiatives and projects in this field in the Baltic Sea Region with a view to improve coordination and communication among them. The interim results of an analysis carried out by the LP, based on the transnational ERDF BSR program and the ERDF cross border co-operation program “South Baltic”, show ten projects that are relevant for PA Tourism. These projects have a joint budget of about 20 Mio. €, they comprise 120 partners in different BSR countries. The analysis of the remaining ERDF Objective 3 programs in the BSR will be concluded until the end of the year 2010. According to first estimates, there are about 60-80 relevant projects going on with about 300 – 400 partners. In the framework of the PA tourism, the coordinators of these projects shall be invited in the coming year in order to discuss a better exchange and cooperation among them and to invite them to take part in the implementation process of the PA Tourism. This data shows that there is a big potential of best practices, human and financial resources that so far have not been fully seized in the Baltic Sea Region. The EUSBSR offers now a framework to create more synergies in the region. The potential for new thematic and transnational macro-regional products does also exist in other parts of the EU but so far, the overall value of these regional and transnational projects and



initiatives for the EU tourism policy has not been adequately seized. The activities under the PA tourism offer the possibility to develop a showcase in this respect, also to the benefit of the EU tourism policy.

Developing innovation in the tourism industry

Innovation and new information technologies are considered to be the determining factors for the competitiveness of the tourism sector where especially the capacities of SMEs should be strengthened. Some of the most innovative countries in the world are bordering the BSR. Therefore, knowledge and technologies available in the region should be actively included in this process. One project to refer to in this context is “Baltic Museums 2.0” in the framework of which partners from Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Russia develop innovative technical information and communication tools for oceanographic museums that have the potential to become pilot solutions in this field. The “ICT and tourism” platform under Actions 3 of the EU Communication could help to disseminate these useful project results.¹ Appropriate ICT solutions are also essential with regard to the accessibility of tourism products, both in the geographical and digital sense of the word. Therefore, this aspect also plays a role in the FP 12.5 which is dedicated to the development of tourism in rural areas, especially coastal ones.

Improving professional skills

One of the Cooperative Actions (CA) in the PA Tourism focuses on the creation of a network and a cluster of stakeholders of the tourism industry and tourism education bodies. In this context, the promotion of opportunities offered by various EU programs to give support to professional training and the development of skills in the tourism sector is considered useful and appropriate.

Consolidating the socioeconomic knowledge base for tourism

The Commission’s proposal to develop pilot projects aiming at the creation of cross-cutting stakeholder networks in the tourism sector might offer the possibility to advance the network structures, also in the BSR, which are essential for the sustainable success of the implementation of PA Tourism. It is intended to submit an application for the underlying call for proposals. Even though limited to the BSR, a pilot network project in tourism could develop to a kind of macro-regional cell of a future wider EU tourism network. In this respect, the region of Southwest Finland that coordinates the FP on the attraction of tourists to rural and coastal areas can make an important contribution. In the implementation of their FP, they can draw upon many years of Finnish experience in successful triple helix cooperation structures that can be considered to be one of the key features of the national innovation model.

The Centre of Expertise for Tourism and Experience Management at Turku Touring will help to make this know-how operational to the benefit of the further development of the tourism cooperation network in the BSR, and potentially also in the EU.

Ad 2. Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism

The development of sustainable strategies in the tourism sector and sustainable tourist packages and projects is also one key objective in PA Tourism. It is anchored in one of the CA’s which aims at highlighting and optimizing the sustainable tourism potential in the BSR, including Russia. This is being made operational in the FP 12.8 which is led by the University of Greifswald. The University has a vast experience in this matter that is reflected in past and ongoing projects like “AGORA – Network Sustainable Tourism Development in the BSR” that received funding under the transnational ERDF programme for the BSR. One of the results of that project has been the development of a “sustainability check”, a tool to give support to tourism project developers as to the sustainability of their endeavors. It is planned to further develop it into an online tool. Next to that, the University of Greifswald is a member in the “Expert Group on Sustainable Development - Baltic 21” under the

¹ <http://www.balticmuseums.org>



umbrella of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The University acts again as lead partner of the follow-up project “AGORA 2.0 – Heritage Tourism for increased Baltic Sea Region Identity” which was approved as a Baltic 21 light house project. In a broader sense, these activities contribute to the wider efforts dedicated to develop a branding for the whole macro-region.

Another topic in this priority of the EU Communication is the promotion of the coastal and maritime tourism. It is obvious that this is also the major reference point for tourism in the BSR. Through the processes and the competencies organized within the PA Tourism, the BSR can make valuable contributions also at the European level to develop appropriate strategies.

The inclusion of the Russian Baltic Sea regions has not been an easy going process so far, as Russia is not considered to be a part of the EUSBSR while her contribution in the implementations seems to be important if not indispensable in some fields to make the Strategy a success. In the field of tourism, the BSR therefore is in a special situation, as St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad are first of all an integral part of the BSR tourism market, a source and a destination of tourists in the region. One of the aspects in PA Tourism is also the strengthening of the existing networks and cooperation structures with partners from Russia. These activities might also offer an interesting interface regarding the EU activities related to the Russian market.

Ad. 3. Consolidate the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality tourist destinations

In principle, the challenges to develop and market a cross country brand in tourism are similar, both at EU and BSR level. In the region, different initiatives and projects deal with this issue, so far lacking a coordinated approach. A common brand needs to be credible, convincing and comprehensive. A mere internet-based approach would fall short of the necessities. It requires financial and human resources that – for reasons of feasibility – should come from a central body, but the outcome cannot be decreed centrally. Its creation needs to involve the most important stakeholders in the sector in order to be accepted. In the ideal case, the brand “Baltic Sea Region” would be marketed hand in hand with “visiteurope.com”.

In any case, bottom-up approaches provide useful insights. An impressive example is “Cruise Baltic”, an association of 27 cruise destinations from around the Baltic Sea, that have joined forces to globally brand the BSR as a cruise ship destination, e.g. at the annual Seatrade Cruise Shipping Convention in Miami. With Cruise Baltic, the port cities have overcome their competition and thus became recognizable for the global cruise industry for the benefit of all the partners involved.

Ad. 4. Maximize the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism

As first analyses show, a lot of tourism related initiatives, projects and investments are co-financed by EU funds, mostly the European structural funds, the EAFRD, the EFF and the EU internal policies cooperation programs. A considerable amount of money and stakeholders are involved in these activities. What is lacking in the underlying EU Communication so far is one or some selected points of reference for these EU co-financed activities. These points of reference could be constituted by the framework for the future EU tourism policy and / or macro-regional strategies like the EUSBSR. They should be complemented by specific knowledge based tools that offer support and orientation to the stakeholders on a voluntary basis. One of the major functions of these points of reference would be to facilitate the integration of the tourism sector, at macro-regional and European level.

The partners and stakeholders involved in the implementation of PA Tourism contribute to the development and the integration of the tourism sector in the BSR and are ready to contribute to corresponding activities at European level.