

EUROPEAN TRADE UNION LIAISON COMMITTEE ON TOURISM (ETLC)

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The European Tourism Sector Competitiveness - Better Regulation - Sustainability

Message from the European Trade Union Liaison Committee on Tourism
Malta, 19 October 2005

The European Trade Union Liaison Committee on Tourism, ETLC, is a cooperation platform of the European Industry Federations and the Global Union Federations representing workers in the various tourism sub-sectors, such as hotels and restaurants, catering, transport, travel agencies, tour operators, leisure parks, tourist offices, tourist guides, etc.

In Europe, EFFAT, ETF and UNI-Europa represent more than 9 million trade union members. They are the representative organisations for their sectors recognised by the European institutions, also with regard to the European social dialogue.

On 18 and 19 October 2005, 48 representatives of workers in transnational travel and tourism companies, of tourism trade unions, of the European Commission and of the Maltese tourism authorities participated in the ETLC conference "New developments in transnational companies in travel, transport and tourism: restructuring and competitiveness" in Malta.

The ETLC acknowledges the topics dealt with at the 4th European Tourism Forum on 20 and 21 October 2005 in Malta: competitiveness, better regulation and sustainability. We particularly welcome the announcement of Commissioner Günter Verheugen to present before the end of the year 2005 a policy proposal for tourism.

Here some of our major concerns:

Preliminary remark:

Acquired social rights are the major pre-condition for tourism.

Collectively agreed rights for workers, e.g. the limitation of working time and the right to paid annual leave, are the very basis of tourism.

Trade unions have been fighting for these rights for more than 100 years.

A cut back of acquired rights would not only lead to a general worsening of social conditions and diminish the possibility of people to travel, but it would by this undermine the very basis of tourism.

Quality employment

In most EU member States, tourism is an important economic factor, being a growing sector and generating an ample number of jobs. The tourism sector's forecasted potential for the creation of employment is enormous.

A cooperation of:

EFFAT
European Federation
of Food, Agriculture
and Tourism Trade
Unions

UNI-Europa
Union Network International
– European regional
organisation

ETF
European Transport
Workers' Federation

IUF
International Union of
Food, Agricultural, Hotel,
Restaurant, Catering,
Tobacco and Allied
Workers' Associations

UNI
Union Network
International

ITF
International
Transport Workers'
Federation

However, looking at numbers should not make us turning a blind eye to the question “What kind of jobs are created in the tourism sector?”.

Also the Lisbon strategy recommends to create not only more jobs, but better jobs as well.

In many countries, parts of the tourism sector are facing severe shortages of qualified staff and a very high staff turn-over, mainly due to unfavourable working conditions.

A high percentage of qualified workers leave the sector within a short time after finishing their vocational training and starting to work.

Many hotel schools are not able any more to recruit enough students who are willing to embark on vocational training in the hospitality sector.

Tourism workers need stable jobs with foreseeable work schedules, allowing them to combine professional and private/family life, providing them with an income they can live on and adequate social protection, but they also need to get acquired skills recognised and rewarded, and to find career paths they can pursue in the sector.

Therefore, the overall aim must be to make tourism an attractive sector to work in and to make employment in the sector more sustainable, by reducing the precariousness of employment and by improving the social conditions through negotiations.

Otherwise, jobs might be created, - but remain vacant!

Sustainable tourism

A sustainable development of European tourism can only be guaranteed, if - alongside economic and environmental aspects - the social dimension of sustainability is taken seriously, i.e. if highest priority is given to sustainable employment in the sector.

It is certainly nice, from a consumer point of view, to fly from Barcelona to Brussels for 25 Euros, or from Hannover to Alicante for 9.99 Euro. But we are convinced that, in the long term, such prices will not contribute to the creation of a sustainable civil aviation sector. It has to be doubted that low cost carriers will be able to fully comply with environmental obligations, safety regulations, labour and social legislation, and that these airlines will be able to offer their staff attractive working conditions and decent salaries, and be willing to respect workers' representation rights.

The same goes for travel packages. The cutthroat price war between tour operators led to a dramatic drop in travel prices over the past years, and to permanent consolidation and restructuring processes in the market. In the labour-intensive tourism sector, this has had an impact on employment and the working conditions of employees. The dominance of the large tour operators vis-à-vis their suppliers in tourism destinations has even led to interference in the collective bargaining autonomy in the destination countries.

The vicious circle of ‘cheap bargain’ travel and tourism has to be stopped, as it undermines the viability of transport and tourism businesses. It does not only cut profit margins, but also eliminates financial room for manoeuvre to offer socially responsible and environmentally sustainable tourism. In view of the negative effects, particularly on employment, new approaches must be taken to get the message across to tourists that sustainable tourism offering high-quality services has its price.

No to deregulation – Yes to better regulation

We acknowledge the attempts of the Commission to simplify EU regulation and to scrap unnecessary red tape.

But: less regulation is not necessarily better regulation, particularly not in the social field.

Justified by the need to remain competitive in a more and more globalised market economy, many Member States pursue reforms of their labour market, often through cut backs of acquired social rights and social benefits.

Proposals for European directives which are currently in the legislative procedure, such as the Working Time Directive and the Directive on Services in the Internal Market, follow the same reasoning.

In their current form, these Directives would open the possibility for a race to the bottom with regard to working conditions and social protection.

Tourism, due to its very nature, is a sector with a cross-border dimension and enjoys a high degree of flexibility in the organisation of work.

The special requirements of the tourism sector with regard to the flexibility needed to accommodate periodic fluctuations in demand are taken into account in collective bargaining between trade unions and employers' associations.

We do not need more deregulation and flexibility, particularly not in the social field, but we need minimum standards binding for all.

NEED FOR ACTION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

- Strengthen the social dialogue

Challenges and problems should be dealt with at the most appropriate level, by those who through their investment and through their daily work provide tourism services, i.e. in the social dialogue between employers and employees and their representative organisations. Here, tailor-made solutions to jointly identified problems can be found, agreements concluded and implemented, etc.

But, social dialogue in tourism has not yet been used to its full potential.

Social partners should be given a primary role, also in the shaping of a European tourism policy.

- Set up an European Observatory for Tourism

A European Observatory on Employment and Qualification in Tourism, with full involvement of the social partners, would certainly facilitate the monitoring of developments in the tourism sector and the assessment of the -social- sustainability of the tourism industry.

- Implement impact assessment

Any impact assessment of policies and initiatives in the field of tourism should always examine the potential effects they could have on employment and social conditions in the tourism sector.

Any EU grant to tourism projects or tourism companies should be closely tied to the respect of social standards and labour legislation. Support should be provided only to projects that make an explicit contribution to employment; i.e. create sustainable jobs, improve qualifications of the workforce, and involve participation by employees and their representatives.

- Create a level playing field

All measures taken at EU level in order to improve the competitiveness and the sustainability of the tourism industry, with good quality employment and training should, not only to avoid social dumping and unfair competition, but also to provide businesses with a level playing field.