

**Speech by Mr Richard Rosser, Chairman of the European Trade Union
Committee on Tourism to the European Tourism Forum – 10th December
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The European Trade Union Liaison Committee on Tourism was set up by the relevant European and International Trade Union organisations in Brussels in 1995 to represent people working in the tourism sector. The Committee aims to ensure that decision takers at the European level are aware of the specific needs and interests of the workforce in tourism.

Pursuing the overall aim to promote the creation of sustainable employment in tourism, the main objectives of the committee are:

- To improve working conditions for tourism workers
- To promote basic and continuing training in the tourism industry
- To promote the Social Dialogue in the tourism sector
- To strengthen cross border co-operation between trade union organisations representing employees in the tourism sector.

Tourism is Europe's biggest industry, yet tourism is a sector that in Europe has been squeaking like a mouse for far too long. It now needs to roar like a lion.

Tourism is a very diverse industry comprising a wide range of different activities and businesses. That is one reason its voice and influence has not reflected its importance to the European economy. Perhaps another reason is because its importance is greater to the economies of countries in southern Europe than to the economies of the more dominant EU members in northern Europe.

It is a sector where, because of the nature of the workforce and high turnover rates, overall levels of trade union organisation are below those in other sectors which have both a more powerful voice and stronger and more meaningful social dialogue and partnership. The relationship between meaningful social partnership and dialogue and sectors that punch their own weight is not a coincidence.

There are indications though that the industry is beginning to get its act together and its voice heard. Today's forum is an example. We have also seen the growth of powerful tourism organisations owning travel agencies, tour operators, leisure and sports complexes, airlines and hotel chains. Diversification under one roof. However there is concern that large powerful multi-national tourism companies have the financial muscle to bring unfair pressure to bear on small and medium sized enterprises and not least hoteliers in the destination countries, which has an impact on employment conditions.

What is important is that the voices of all interests within the industry are taken into account, and that includes not only customers and interests who own companies in the tourism field, some of which are very powerful, but also the millions who work in the industry.

It cannot be a source of satisfaction that jobs in the tourism sector are predominantly low paid, temporary or seasonal in nature, or that it is an industry where clear career structures to encourage employee commitment are all too sparse – and it should be a particular concern that this should be the case in a sector where jobs are increasing. A significant percentage of tourism sector employees are women. The industry needs to think hard about whether it finds it acceptable in today's world, where discrimination against women is rightly a cause of concern, that an industry that employs so many women should be associated with low pay and temporary and seasonal employment.

We want to see high levels of professionalism within the tourism sector as a whole and not just within some parts of it – in the same way as we expect professionalism in other service sectors. But professionalism is not normally associated with low pay, high turnover rates, inadequate training, poor working environments and limited career structures.

The tourism sector is very competitive and price sensitive, and the pressure to hold down or reduce costs can be considerable. In an industry where labour costs constitute a significant percentage of total costs it is those employed within the industry who bear the brunt of cost saving measures whether through lack of security of employment, inferior pay and conditions of employment or insufficient resources being invested in training. Too often it is tourism sector employees who are paying the bill for cheap holidays. To accept low pay and high staff turnover as a fact of life is to accept that the tourism industry is built on very insecure foundations.

There has to be a recognition that in a people orientated sector such as tourism, where quality should be at least as important as quantity, investment in the labour force is not a burdensome additional cost to be avoided, but a crucial ingredient of success. That applies just as much to investing to achieve quality management as it does to developing the skills and expertise of those who are managed. Improvements in the quality of tourism services will be dependent on having a motivated and qualified labour force.

As has been said already today, the tourism sector is one where detailed information is lacking. There is a need for more coherent and reliable statistical information data on employment, employment conditions and standards and levels of training and qualifications. One area of concern is health and safety. A recent survey has shown for example that in Denmark, cooks, waiters and other hotel and restaurant staff have statistically the most dangerous occupation. When viewed in comparison with other occupations in Denmark, this group scores the highest regarding hospitalisation and mortalities with the end result that life expectancy is lower than average. It is most unlikely that this situation is confined to one country. Unfortunately very little research seems to have been undertaken regarding the causes. Health and safety may be a bigger issue than many think for staff in the tourism sector.

Those employed within the sector have a key role to play in the future progress and development of the tourism industry. That key role can be delivered.

- Through developing the Social Dialogues at the workplace and at European level with joint commitments on improving the quality of services for tourists.
- Through having framework agreements for tourism in Europe which will set out common standards in Europe on training and qualifications for tourism staff to improve quality of service, make life harder for the less reputable organisations and provide a basis for building careers in the tourism profession.
- Through collective bargaining improve conditions of employment including pay, increase the proportion of permanent jobs. To create stability, reduce turn over rates, increase commitment and develop quality of service.

As incomes rise, and leisure time increases, demand for tourism should rise. The increase will be determined by the extent to which the industry in Europe grasps the opportunities and Mr Frangialli gave us a warning on this point this morning. In the medium and long term the prospects for the sector look bright. Those employed within the sector want to be given the opportunities to play, in full, the key role they have in turning those bright prospects into reality.