

ETC President Arthur Oberascher addresses European Parliament

Tourism can help achieve Lisbon Strategy—but needs to be given more political weight by EU

Brussels—1 February—The president of the European Travel Commission (ETC), Arthur Oberascher, today addressed a hearing held by the European Parliament's Transport and Tourism Committee on policies needed for sustainable European tourism.

The ETC president said at the heart of tourism's sustainability is what motivates guests to come to Europe. The moment of truth in tourism is when guest meets host. Those who wanted to promote sustainable tourism in Europe had first to listen to guests' wishes, dreams and needs.

Oberascher, who doubles as Austrian National Tourist Office chief executive officer, told parliamentarians that the ETC, which joins together 33 European national tourist offices, views tourism globally in all its aspects, economic, social and ecological, and sees itself as the advocate of 402 million guests who visit Europe annually.

The ETC president staked out three tasks that must be addressed to keep Europe's tourism industry competitive. Firstly, those in the business have to be enabled to be perfect hosts. This requires bringing about a change in the position and perception of tourism. The ETC president likened tourism's current status to a "willing, well-humoured waiter of the economy". This neither reflected tourism's importance as a sector that generates 5-11% of the European Union's GDP, nor was conducive to assuring the industry's future prosperity.

Secondly, conditions have to be created so that guests would receive the welcome they expect and deserve. This was particularly necessary in order to capitalise on growing interest in travel in emerging source markets such as China, India, Russia and Brazil. In Oberascher's view the ability to welcome guests from other cultures with respect and meet their requirements is a challenge to Europe's cultural sensitivity. Meeting exceptional standards would in turn help boost the industry's overall competitiveness.

Thirdly, support for the tourism sector must be invested in projects that enhance its high-tech character. Oberascher explained that although "tourism is not considered high-tech or very innovative...it has produced an astounding degree of innovation in the service sector" citing the airline industry, yield management and tourism's pioneering role in e-business as examples.

The ETC president issued a call for political action, stating that to make Europe a pole of excellence in the service sector and to create jobs "tourism needs political weight".

Oberascher declared, "to help achieve the goals set out in the Lisbon Strategy we have to give tourism a place high on the European Union's list of priorities", and appealed to European policy makers to give tourism structures and symbols—such as a commissioner—stressing that tourism must be made an issue for the EU.

Ends.