

**Draft statement by János Vértés**  
**2009 European Tourism Forum**  
**Brussels - Belgium**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Economic and Social Committee, and in particular its Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which I am honoured to represent, I should like to start by congratulating the organisers for having organised this large-scale event on European Tourism.

A couple of days ago I attended a meeting on tourism in Ceuta. I delivered a speech on diversity in tourism. Diversity is a key notion in Europe. The European Union was founded on the principle of diversity of cultures, customs, beliefs and opinion. Diversity of cultures, of opinion and of peoples has created the unique wonder that is the European Union. Diversity – in this case – has led to unity. I am convinced that it is cultural diversity that is the main feature of a pluralist and democratic Europe. The European Economic and Social Committee, a consultative body established by the Treaty, brings together the representatives of civil society, enabling them to play a part in the European Union's decision-making process. Being able to bring together in one room the diversity of the opinions of this cross-section of civil society represents a valuable tool for those who have the task of making the laws that apply to 450 million Europeans.

. This is a fact that shows the values of diversity. Meetings – such as the one in Ceuta and this one – bring together diversity, diversified opinions and views and enable us to solve the problems caused by the current economic crisis and help tourism evolve.

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Over the past two days we have heard the views of expert speakers on sustainable tourism, the role of SMEs in developing sustainable tourism and have seen the challenges posed by the current economic crisis. I do not wish to repeat or to give a summary of the facts and opinions that we have heard.

However, I shall mention a phenomenon that – in my opinion – has the potential to counterbalance the negative effects of the current economic crisis: the notion of social tourism.

The Economic and Social Committee has been dealing with the notion of social tourism for a long time. In 2006 it drew up an opinion on social tourism. Three years ago we were not aware of the fact that our opinion would have been more timely in 2009 than it was then. The focal point of social tourism is the following: it is an inalienable right of every citizen to enjoy tourism and leisure. Young people have a great urge to travel but need affordable and secure accommodation, while older people have more time available but have greater needs than the ordinary traveller. The disabled, especially, can benefit from a holiday, but need special facilities to enjoy the destination. It is in our interest to promote social tourism – and not to see tourism purely in terms of generating employment.

The World Tourism Organization confirmed in its Manila Declaration the mission and objectives of social tourism, which can be defined as the following: to make tourist leisure accessible to the majority, including young people, families and elderly people, by providing an exceptional economic opportunity.

Identified and implemented through social tourism are a set of specific measures, including the definition of the social policies of tourism, the

establishment of support systems for staff training and creation of infrastructure, among others.

The majority of initiatives that form part of the overall strategy are generally regarded as effective shapers of society, rather than large-scale projects. Social tourism operators strive to make key contributions to the improvement of human relations, through organising activities and training.

Such tourism is seen as a promoter of economic growth, offering an exceptional economic opportunity and generating a continuous flow of investment and people, which, in turn, contributes to regional development, encourages the transfer of resources from rich economies to poor countries and promotes national and international wealth.

Social tourism is aimed at benefiting the whole community by contributing to the economic and social development of regions and citizens as a whole. All stakeholders in tourism development are subject to the same expectations of professionalism and competence, whether facility managers or entrepreneurs, guides or tour organisers, entertainers or educators.

Social tourism can and should be reinforced, and should help to promote the conditions of equality, justice, democracy and well-being that enable the mutually-supportive development of all peoples around the world.

This conference's main focus was on sustainability. The concept of sustainable tourism has been adopted and expressed in the following objectives: to provide neglected regions with fresh resources; to reconcile environmental protection and tourism development; to generate local cultural, social and economic benefits. Social tourism stems from the objectives of sustainable tourism, but has some important additional values: improvement in the well-being and

personal development of beneficiaries and the host community; profitability and economic gain for the tourist industry, particularly by extending the high season; and last but not least the human dimension and values of the activity.

I hope that you find my initiative worthwhile.

Thank you for your attention.