



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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*Ms Laura Boldrini
President of the
Camera dei Deputati,
Piazza Montecitorio
IT – 00100 ROMA*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera dei Deputati for its Opinion concerning the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism" {COM(2014) 86 final}.

The Commission recognises the importance of coastal and maritime tourism, in particular for Italy, not least because of the beauty of its beaches and coastal landscapes, its rich cultural heritage and the attractiveness of its cruise destinations.

The implementation of the Action Plan of the above Communication will benefit the tourism sector in Italy and across the European sea basins.

The success of the European strategy relies on the cooperation among the European institutions, Member States, regions, industry and tourism stakeholders. The Commission will continue to play its role as facilitator in this process with the aim of promoting the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector and the exchange of good practices.

As regards the availability of EU funding for the tourism sector, the Commission has published an online guide for the funding period 2014-2020¹ where further information can be found to help tourism stakeholders benefit from the multi-sectorial EU financial opportunities (direct and indirect grants). A specific focus on coastal and maritime tourism will be developed within this guide by the end of 2016.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=7847&lang=en

The coordination efforts among different levels in the field of coastal and maritime tourism are particularly visible in the framework of the European sea-basin and macro-regional strategies, namely the Adriatic and Ionian² and the Baltic³, which are already being implemented with the strong commitment of their respective stakeholders.

To foster the promotion of EU tourism destinations, particularly those outside Europe, the Commission is enhancing its cooperation with the European Travel Commission (ETC) which includes: promoting, producing and sharing market research and innovative (digital) marketing tools, offering a forum for knowledge-sharing and best practice, as well as giving tourists better information.

As to seasonality and social tourism (including accessible tourism, senior and youth travel), the Commission has promoted several calls for proposals aiming at strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of the European tourism sector by encouraging the extension of the tourist season, by diversifying the EU tourism product and by enhancing its accessibility.

The Commission welcomes the suggestion of the Camera dei Deputati to establish a permanent European Observatory for the tourism sector. In 2014, the Commission launched an online portal, the Virtual Tourism Observatory, which serves as a repository of existing information about tourism in Europe. It is the intention of the Commission to enrich the Observatory with an overview of existing EU legislation applicable to tourism and with a user-friendly interface showing available information on key indicators, such as seasonality, employment and earnings. The Commission also takes note of the suggestion to enhance the services provided by the Observatory by improving the availability and comparability of indicators for the tourism sector.

The Commission takes note of the importance of the development of marinas. The Commission has launched a study on coastal and maritime tourism to identify and promote innovative strategies for a more competitive nautical tourism in Europe, including innovative practices for marina enhancement. The study intends to identify current bottlenecks and potential options for the sustainable growth of marinas and their interrelated activities. The final report will be published by the end of 2015.

The Commission also takes note of the need to ensure a coherent tourist offer for islands and peripheral destinations through regional and national strategies. The Commission has launched a study to assess the issue of island connectivity and the need of innovative tourism strategies for islands, in particular the most remote ones. This study will evaluate ways to encourage year-round tourism policies, supporting a more stable economic return for tourism operators and contributing to increased regular transport connections. The final report will be published by the end of 2015.

² Countries involved: Italy, Greece, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

³ Countries involved: Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

In order to promote the reconversion and reuse of existing maritime infrastructure for islands and remote localities, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can support small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure. Funding requests for infrastructure are more likely to be successful where they are clearly part of a territorial strategy and with the ambition of achieving financial self-sustainability.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the concerns raised by the Camera dei Deputati and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans TIMMERMANS
First Vice-President*

*Karmenu VELLA
Member of the Commission*