



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOURISM

BRUSSELS

11 June 2014, 09:30 to 17:30

DRAFT MINUTES

Disclaimer: For the ease of reading and to keep the reference numbers corresponding to the informative fiches, the minutes follow the order of points as they were foreseen in the agenda of the meeting, not necessarily the order they were discussed.

Chair of the meeting: Mr Pedro Ortún, Director and Ms Francesca Tudini, Head of Tourism Policy Unit

Morning session

The chair, Ms. Tudini, welcomed the participants of the meeting and in particular new TAC representatives from several countries. Then, she introduced briefly new staff members in the units dealing with tourism.

1) Approval of the agenda

Approved with a remark that the order could be slightly changed depending on the arrival of the Director, Mr. Ortun.

2) Approval of the draft minutes of the meeting of 15 January 2014

Approved with no comments.

3) Work programme 2014:

The chair reminded that one week before the meeting, TAC members have received the informative fiches on the main actions and points of the agenda. The staff of the Tourism Units have been asked to briefly present the update of the files and then after each point the floor was open to questions of TAC members.

a) EDEN – European Destinations of Excellence

France and Greece raised the point about the electronic submission obligation concerning the EDEN call for proposals. This apparently is not a simplification for France and Greece which have to print anyway the file for the approval of their authorities and they would prefer to submit the proposal in a paper version. The representative of the EASME (Executive Agency for Small and Medium size Enterprises, which is dealing since 2014 with the technical and financial management of calls for proposals/calls for tenders of the DG ENTR) explained that electronic submission has been introduced for all calls in order to simplify the management of submissions for the agency as well as for applicants. Should there be technical problems using the tools a technical help desk will be available.

b) Sustainable transnational thematic tourism products

No questions have been risen apart the general remark from Belgium on the issue that the call is planned to be open during the summer time which is a high season for many tourism stakeholders. The Commission services explained that it has been taken into account and the call will be open longer, for 3 months and not as in the past for 2 months only. On the other hand, the Commission and the EASME have time constraints to commit the budget till the end of the year.

c) Promotion of European and transnational tourism products with special emphasis on cultural and industrial products

No questions.

d) Cooperation with the Council of Europe

No questions.

e) Diversification of tourism offer through synergies with creative and high-end industries

France, Hungary and Cyprus raised the point that the requirement of involving 5 countries in this kind of projects is a lot especially for the very narrow themes proposed such as: chocolate, cars, and perfumes. Some countries expressed the concerns that the themes proposed exclude some Member States. Therefore Cyprus and the Netherlands suggested to leave the themes open to applicants. Hungary and Poland suggested adding to the themes e.g: jewellery and the clothes/textile industry. Malta also mentioned wine and cheese and questioned the amount of the grant which seemed not to be very attractive.

The Commission services explained that this is a pilot initiative and thanked for all suggestions which will be taken into account as far as possible for this year and the future calls.

f) Senior tourism initiative and e-Calypso

France expressed the wish to be more informed about the initiative; it would like to receive a kind of press release or material on the main developments (e.g on the e-Calypso platform) which could be easily forwarded to all stakeholders. The Commission services clarified that after the current transitory period more visibility will be planned for this action with a new Commissioner.

g) Tourism and accessibility for all

The Commission services made a comprehensive presentation of the results of the 3 studies produced under this Preparatory Action and informed about the special event – conference to present these results on 6 June in Brussels. The winners of the award on accessible tourism have been also briefly described.

Germany thanked for this activity and congratulated good results. It underlined the importance of accessible tourism for Germany and informed that Germany has been working on unified standards in this area.

h) ICT & Tourism initiative

France raised the point about the difficulty to register to the Conference of 24 June on the TourismLink portal and regretted the portal is available in English only. The Commission services thanked for this notice and proceeded with ensuring removal of the problems. It clarified also that the decision making about the translation of the portal is currently ongoing.

Austria asked for a possible press message from the Commission that could be disseminated about the two portals (TourismLink and Tourism Business Portal). Hungary asked how the companies can participate in this platform. The Commission services explained that the portal TourismLink is open to all businesses and the procedure on how to access it is available on the web and provided the respective press releases in English and French languages after the TAC meeting.

Luxembourg raised the issue of the length of the website name for the Tourism Business Portal which is not easy. The Commission explained that as the portal is hosted on the Europa website and thus some specific rules had to be respected for the website address. *In the meantime, the link to the Tourism Business Portal was simplified to the following one:* <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/tourism-business-portal>.

i) Communication campaign to promote Europe in international markets

The Commission services explained that in the future the Communication campaign will not aim to promote Europe as a destination per se but will focus rather on

communicating the Commission initiatives with integrated approach tailored to general public/different segments.

+ ad-hoc grant with European Travel Commission (ETC)

The presentation on the ETC activities in the framework of this grant agreement had been sent to TAC members before the meeting. The Commission services underlined that the focus of the 2014 grant with the ETC is the update and revamp of the www.visiteurope.com portal, in particular through the creation of new user-friendly content in terms of transnational pan European tourist experiences.

Austria and Hungary asked the questions on a target group of the campaign, on big events where the Commission plans to promote its initiatives and how – only the initiatives or also their results. The Netherlands asked why the Netherlands are not featured on the ETC website.

The Commission services clarified that the Communication Campaign will aim to inform about the Commission initiatives the large public. The events where the Communication campaign will take place are still to be decided, apart the Expo Milano 2015 in which the Commission has already decided to participate. Member States were invited to send their proposals for other possible big events. The chair clarified that as the Netherlands are not a member of the ETC, they are not currently featured on the www.visiteurope.com website.

j) International files in the field of tourism

Following up on the Commission's presentation, both France and Germany asked about the 16 LoIs and MoUs signed with Third Countries in the field of the tourism. In particular, the involvement of and possible benefits for the private enterprise were debated. France raised the issue that more and more agreements are being signed but unfortunately the private businesses are not much involved in the implementation of concrete international projects. Germany reacted by saying that at national level the public administration is not able to assist businesses in their relations with other countries. Better understanding of the needs of operators on the ground and closer cooperation is needed. Poland and Bulgaria welcomed this point of the agenda. Greece asked to clarify what is expected from Member States to implement these agreements.

The Commission on one hand recalled the 'political' message, which it had meant to send, by bringing tourism to the fore at international level. On the other hand it clarified that, also taking into account the limited human and financial resources, it has been proactively trying to concretely implement only those agreements with countries both having expressed a genuine interest and presenting a major potential. The example of China was given, in that the Commission has been pursuing a dialogue with a view to possibly undertaking a common project on senior tourist exchanges. Also, bearing in mind the objective to complement Member States' activities and not to duplicate them, the chair also prompted all Member States to provide the Commission with detailed

information on any on-going initiative, contacts, let alone agreements, with the countries in question, and to signal their priorities.

Hungary informed about the opening of a Chinese cooperation office in Budapest on 22 May with the aim to promote Central European Member States in China and the Commission asked the Hungarian authorities to provide more detailed information.

k) European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)

No questions. The Commission services informed among others about the planned workshop on 4th July to present the results of the first testing phase of ETIS and asked Member State for helping in dissemination of information about this tool for tourist destinations.

l) Virtual Tourism Observatory (VTO), Eurobarometer, cooperation with OECD

The Commission services informed that the VTO website is expected to be launched online this summer and the next edition of the Eurobarometer is planned in 2015. It also underlined the importance of tourism statistics and the need of full cooperation from Member States in providing the data, reports etc. Hungary asked if the Commission has financial resources to support Member States in compiling Tourism Satellite Accounts. The Commission services explained that around a year ago when the Commission wanted to propose a project to support the Tourism Satellite Accounts, only 7-8 Member States showed interest. This was not considered as a critical mass to launch a common initiative.

m) EURES and skills in the tourism sector

Austria asked the Commission to provide information on EURES that could be easily disseminated in the Member States in a form of a general press release as well as a comprehensive explanation on how to use the EURES portal and all its functionalities for the tourism sector. The Commission services assured that the additional information will be circulated about the newly introduced functionalities offered by the EURES portal, managed by the DG EMPL.

Presentation on the European Qualifications Framework by DG EAC representative. *The presentation has been sent to TAC members after the meeting.*

Presentation on Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Programme by DG ENTR, D1 unit representative. *The presentation has been sent to TAC members after the meeting.*

n) Macro-regions strategies and Tourism

After the presentation by the Commission services on the relevance of the Macro regional strategies for tourism and vice versa, Poland reported on its cooperation within the Baltic Macro-region and its participation in the Forum of the Baltic countries. It mentioned also the lack of political support and the financial resources for the implementation of the Strategy. Poland informed that the cooperation with Russia is rather positive; the Kaliningrad region is present at the Fora. Poland suggested the idea of giving more visibility to Macro-regions (their common cultural, natural heritage) e.g within the promotion of Europe and the ETC activities.

Bulgaria being together with Romania the coordinator of the Tourism pillar of the Danube Strategy stressed the issue of lack of the financial resources especially to finance research on macro-regional level. The Commission services indicated that it followed the developments by the Coordinators closely and it was ready to assist where possible. At first meeting with Romania on this had already taken place.

The chair explained that the European Structural and Investments Funds are available for the Macro-regions (especially ERDF – territorial cooperation) to promote trans border regional cooperation as it was presented at the Info Day on 20th March on EU funding opportunities for Tourism.

o) Events

The Commission services briefly reported on the planned events, on which TAC members will be informed as soon as more detail is available.

Tentative dates of the 2014 events:

ETIS workshop – 4 July

EDEN Network meeting – 21 October

Senior initiative - 2 events planned in October

European Tourism Forum – 30 -31 October

European Tourism Day -1 December

Next TAC meeting – 2 December

Afternoon session

4) Reports and planned initiatives of the Presidencies and of other TAC representatives:

a) Greek Presidency

Greece thanked for a good cooperation during their Presidency and reported on the High level Conference on Coastal and Maritime tourism organised during the Presidency.

b) Italian Presidency (European Tourism Forum)

Italy informed about the new dates of the European Tourism Forum that currently is planned to take place in Napoli (Italy) on 30-31 October. The first day of the Forum will be dedicated to “Future vision of Tourism”, whereas the two panels on the second day will focus on digitalisation and cultural resources to promote tourism. A dedicated Ministerial meeting has been also foreseen.

Moreover, Italy informed that the Council Conclusions are planned for December based on Coastal and Maritime tourism and synergies between tourism and culture.

The chair informed that a discussion document will be prepared for the European Tourism Forum. The Commission services are also reflecting about improvement of the governance and the ideas how to reinforce the work of TAC would be welcome also from TAC members.

Poland informed about the event organised in Warsaw on 1-2 October – OECD Committee meeting + Seminar on the impact of big sports events on tourism.

Austria informed also about the event to be organised on 15 September concerning sport and tourism.

Finally, the chair also informed that the Guide on the EU funding opportunities that the Tourism Team is preparing should be published in July.

5) Actions for tourism under COSME 2015 (Programme for the Competitiveness and SMEs) – exchange of views

TAC members have received one week before the meeting a draft 2015 COSME Work Programme for tourism to be presented at the COSME Committee meeting of 24 June.

The Netherlands made a remark concerning the indicators, saying that impact should be better measured, not only number of projects. Malta and Belgium asked about the plans of cooperation with OECD and UNWTO. Germany also remarked that it would be a good idea to look closely into the initiatives and their effects e.g. EDEN, and how they could be made better promoted and popular.

The chair thanked for the remarks and explained that the Commission could possibly foresee the evaluation of impacts by a more qualitative assessment e.g. in a form of study. The chair invited TAC members to send to the Commission suggestions on which projects/initiatives the Member States would wish it does a more qualitative evaluation.

On the cooperation with OECD, the chair clarified that the Commission has a grant with OECD covering 2 years that is why no new grant is foreseen in 2015. With UNWTO the discussions are ongoing and the Commission need to agree on the content of the new grant agreement.

6) State of play of the main tourism files:

a) Visa package

Presentation by DG HOME – Ms Anne-Marie SOERENSEN (HOME). *Her presentation was sent to TAC members after the meeting.*

Cyprus congratulated the cooperation between both DGs (ENTR and HOME) on the visa file. They asked about the possibility for Chinese citizens to introduce electronically a visa application and if it is foreseen to waive the visa obligation for the Emirates.

France asked to be possibly informed about the dates of meetings in the Council concerning visa as there are some difficulties in the coordination between Ministries. Austria and Hungary thanked the Commission for this initiative. Hungary underlined good cooperation between different Ministries on that issue. Poland noted also some difficulties in the cooperation with other Ministries and asked about steps towards a possible waiver of visa for Ukraine's citizens. Germany underlined that this initiative is a big step forward but also noted some difficulties in coordinating with different Ministries and asked if the Commission plans to organise a meeting gathering together all different Ministries relevant for this issue.

The Commission services (DG HOME) clarified that this is rather an internal matter of Member States to coordinate between different Ministries and that no meeting with 3 different Ministers at EU level has been foreseen. Concerning the Emirates, further to the adoption of Regulation No 509/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 transferring the United Arab Emirates into the list of countries whose nationals no longer need a visa to enter the Schengen area, the visa waiver agreement has to be negotiated. The DG HOME representative also referred to an on-going Visa dialogue with Ukraine, although no date has been set yet to remove the visa obligation for them.

b) European Tourism Quality Principles (ETQP)

The chair explained that there has been an opposition in the Council WG with a blocking minority of 8 Member States on the Proposal of the Council Recommendation on the ETQP, which was expressed through a Joint Statement from these Member States. He expressed also the view that the issue of quality of tourism services deserves a deeper discussion at EU level.

Poland took the floor underlying that it liked the first proposal of the Commission services - the idea of a regulation with a European Tourism Quality Label as an umbrella label at EU level and it regretted that this first project has been modified.

c) European strategy for coastal and maritime tourism

The presentation has been sent to TAC members after the meeting.

Cyprus asked for more information about the planned study on Islands connectivity.

The Commission services specified that the study will not focus on a single specific island but it will show rather a series of examples, case studies.

Italy reminded about the planned Council Conclusions for December and the possibility to extend their scope. First Council meeting on the subject is planned for September.

d) Public consultation on “Assessment of the regulatory and administrative framework of the European tourism”

The presentation has been sent to TAC members after the meeting.

e) Public consultation on “The European tourism of the future”

The presentation has been sent to TAC members after the meeting.

The chair informed TAC members that summary reports of both consultations are currently in preparation and will be available on the Europa during the summer.

Malta expressed the opinion that quality issue is popular according to the results of the consultations and that some quality standards could possibly be envisaged for tourism sector.

Spain also expressed the opinion that the work on quality should be further continued. Germany clarified that countries which opposed the proposal in the Council were not against following the issue of quality at EU level. It expressed also the doubt if the Lisbon Treaty allows the EU to act in the area of promotion and development of touristic products.

The chair concluded saying that as the results of the consultations show that the quality of tourism services deserves deeper analysis at EU level and also clarified that the Commission is coordinating, complementing and supporting the action of the Member States in promoting European and transnational tourism products, as foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty.

7) Member States Annual Reporting

Member States are requested to send their Annual Tourism Reports to the Commission each year. For the 2013 reports, the Commission has proposed a new template (which was elaborated in consultation with the TAC members) and **received 9 reports from**

Member States by the time of the TAC meeting. All reports received will be placed in the Virtual Tourism Observatory (VTO).

The usual deadline for sending the reports is end of February in native language or end of April if in English. This year (because of the new template) the deadline **was mid-May, which was later extended. The Commission services requested those Member States that hadn't yet transmitted their reports to send the Annual Reports at the latest by 27 June in English.**

8) Any other business

When concluding the meeting, the chair announced that the next TAC meeting might take place most probably on the 2nd December, the day after the European Tourism Day, (the date is still to be confirmed). He also invited TAC members to send the suggestions of the topics they would wish to be discussed during TAC meetings.

Organisational issue concerning TAC members' mailing list. The Commission reminded the request to update the TAC members list (the Commission should have a maximum of 2 persons per country as direct TAC members contacts + in addition if necessary max. 1 contact - the MS representation to the EU). TAC members were invited to update the TAC members list when signing the attendance list at the meeting. In case this was not done, TAC members are kindly requested to send the information to the Commission (entr-tourism-tac@ec.europa.eu) with an update of contact persons - TAC members - providing contact details as specified below:

The members of the TAC are requested to inform the Commission (entr-tourism-tac@ec.europa.eu, subject: TAC members) each time a representative is replaced or a contact detail is modified, by using this format:

Full Name:

Service/Function:

Postal address:

Telephone number:

Fax Number:

E-mail:

General request of the Tourism Policy Unit in order to keep files up to date:

The members of the TAC are kindly requested to inform the Commission (entr-tourism-policy@ec.europa.eu) each time there are changes in the hierarchy of the national tourism administration (Minister, State Secretary, etc).