

## The tourism industry is 'make or break' for the EU economy

Written by Ana-Claudia Tapardel on 10 April 2015 in Opinion  
Opinion

Europe's tourism sector has a lot to offer its many international and domestic visitors, but more must be done to support it, argues Ana-Claudia Tapardel.



What would you do on your holiday? Would you relax on the beach of a Greek island? Perhaps you would go skiing in the French Alps, or hiking in the Carpathians? How about a cruise along the Danube delta? Or maybe a wine tour in the Douro valley?

These activities are only a small portion of what Europe has to offer its domestic and international visitors. In fact, its diversity in art, landscapes, food and traditions have all helped make it the world's top tourist destination. From Bucharest to Lisbon, Europe's great variety in terms of scenery, services, cultures and people is unrivalled.

And the economic return from the tourism sector speaks for itself: prior to the accession of Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, tourism accounted for 13 per cent of the EU's GDP. Nowadays, tourism represents 10 per cent of the European economy. The tourism sector employs approximately 5.2 per cent of the total workforce - roughly 10 million jobs - and involves almost two million small and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

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Yet while the tourism sector provides many opportunities to Europe, it is also faced with many challenges. These are mainly related to changes in global trends and increasing competition with non-European countries, particularly in Asia and North America.

For Europe to be competitive and continue attracting both EU and non EU citizens, we first need a defined strategy that will not only take into consideration new global trends, but will also bring together the main institutional actors (the parliament, the commission and the council), as well as the relevant stakeholders in the field.

In this context, I would like to point out that members of parliament's European tourism development, cultural heritage, way of St James and other European cultural routes intergroup - which I co-chair - is actively pushing for the revision and update of the commission's 2010 communication titled, 'Europe, the world's number one tourist destination'.

In order for us to achieve our goals, we must ensure that the European tourism sector and its actors receive the attention they deserve. In my opinion, one way to give the sector the boost it needs is by designating a 'European year for tourism'.

The last year for tourism was 1990. Since then, the EU has expanded, the use of internet has increased, and as mentioned earlier, the global economic patterns have changed. Having a European year for tourism now would allow for more promotion of Europe - beyond its capitals, it would bolster the branding of Europe as a top destination for international tourists, and most importantly, it would assist the numerous SMEs in the field which continue to be affected by the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis.

Our intergroup is seeking the commission's support to push this initiative through. 34 of my colleagues and I have submitted a question to the college on this matter, and our intergroup will continue our efforts in order to reach the council.

We must remember that tourism is one of the industries that can make or break the European economy. For us be able to 'make it', we must ensure the viability, sustainability and diversity of the EU as a destination for years to come. This alone is an opportunity that cannot be missed.

### **About the author**

Ana-Claudia Tapardel (S&D, RO) is a co-chair of parliament's European tourism development, cultural heritage, way of St. James and other European cultural routes intergroup

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