



*European Economic and Social Committee*

Opening Speech by Irini Pari, Vice-President of the EESC  
**2<sup>nd</sup> European Tourism Conference:**  
**"Travel & Tourism: The Day After – Turning Crisis  
into Growth".**

Thessaloniki, Greece, 30 – 31 October 2009

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fathers of Europe had a vision for Europe, moving:

- from war to peace;
- from authoritarian systems to democracy and freedom;
- from poverty to prosperity and a high standard of living;
- from division to union; and
- from controversy to solidarity.

It is with this hope and this vision that the EU has grown and it is this vision we have to keep alive.

Today

- Europe is facing a historic economic crisis with all the social consequences and risks of poverty, high unemployment, xenophobia this can bring.
- Europe is facing a most important environmental and energy challenge. If we go on like that we will need another earth in 2050.
- Europe is facing a demographic challenge seeing its people ageing.
- The world is assuming a new shape.

You might ask yourselves why am I saying this to you.

Well, these challenges are exactly

- the challenges tourism is facing today,
- the challenges tourism has to overcome,
- the challenges tourism can and wants to find a solution.

## **Review of EESC actions in the tourism sector**

- The European Economic and Social Committee has been supporting European tourism policy for many years.

The EESC is the voice of "civil society organisations" – the economic and social players in our society, composed of 344 members, men and women in all 27 Member States. We represent business and crafts, trade unions, farmers, tourism. All have experience at grassroots level. We are not politicians, not technocrats. We sit together and out of all our added values these different and sometimes controversial interests we define the general interest, which we communicate to the decision-makers. It is very important to know what the different parts of society have concluded together so that our decision makers can take the right decisions, which will be implemented in all our countries, at European level.

Tourism has a key role to play "the day after" in getting out of crisis due to its features.

Indeed tourism is an important economic activity especially for some countries like mine (Greece), an important part of their growth.

Tourism generates many jobs, 800 million worldwide.

- **A sustainable aspect:** Major environmental challenges have a direct impact on our regions and tourism sectors, as well as tourism sectors can have an impact on environment
  - Achieving a balance between tourism development and protecting the environment
  - Structural, social, economic and cultural aid for disadvantaged areas
  - A cultural aspect; key role to promote the rich cultural heritage of Europe respecting our history, traditions, characteristics of regions.

Let me put emphasis very close to our heart.

- **A social aspect:** where the human is at the centre  
The idea of "social tourism" gains more currency in these current periods of crisis (not to be neglected)
- As the Manila Declaration of The World Tourism Organisation pointed out,
  - This social aspect is two-fold:
    - It must allow all men and women (the young, the old, people with disabilities, monoparental families etc) to enjoy Europe's rich cultural heritage,
    - It must provide opportunities for economic and social development:
      - 1) for immigrants – big percentage integrating
      - 2) in declining areas creating synergies between for ex. Tourism and agriculture, tourism and old industrial places.

So Ladies and gentlemen,

Is there a role for Europe in Tourism? In our Committee we say YES.

We do not want just a European tourism policy we want a European Tourism Model. A European Tourism Model based on the diversity of principles and values such as sustainability, social well-being, ethics, competitiveness, cooperation and partnership, economic viability, not to mention stability and quality of employment and job security. It is about bringing down borders, working together.

The role of EU is:

- to raise awareness of sustainable (and competitive) tourism
- to ensure monitoring of tourism policy,
- to identify and respond to potential trends,
- to promote cross border tourism
- to support disadvantaged areas
- to have the certification of skills and know-how
- to outline a strategic vision for the future of tourism

All this based on dialogue with you the stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude.

Today tourism faces a great challenge, a great responsibility but also great opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen, I firmly believe in tourism:

- It brings society and differing cultures together, and increases awareness of the diversity and the beauty to be found within Europe and, thus,
- plays a major part in keeping the vision of the fathers of Europe alive ensuring
  - peace,
  - freedom,
  - prosperity,
  - union and
  - solidarity.

Thank you for your attention.

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