

PRESS RELEASE**29 October 2014 - Inertia by Governments is putting Europe's tourism industry at risk**

The tourism industry today calls on European Tourism Ministers to support the adoption of the European Commission's visa package proposal and recommend its swift adoption or risk Europe losing its crown as the world's number one tourist destination.

Ahead of this week's Informal Meeting of Tourism and Culture Ministers, in Naples, NET - the voice of the European tourism industry - is sounding alarm bells about the lack of progress implementing improved visa application rules proposed by the European Commission in April.

Seven months after its publication, Member States have not completed a first reading of the revising proposal and have expressed strong reservations to most of the improvements proposed by the Commission. The proposal, which aims to simplify Schengen visa rules whilst maintaining the level of security, is under review in the Council. Here Government Home Affairs Ministers are mostly concentrating on maintaining stringent rules aimed at preventing illegal immigration and potential terrorist threats, without assessing the economic benefits of simplification of the visa procedures proposed by the Commission. The current visa regime is not fit for purpose and must change. NET urges Member State's Tourism Minister to intervene in this debate now and ensure that there is acknowledgment that simpler visa rules can boost tourism to Europe and thus support economic growth.

Tourism's contribution to the EU's employment and GDP is crucial, with more than 10% of the EU's GDP coming from tourism. The industry employs nearly 20 million people and tourists from non-European countries spend 400 billion euros in Europe.

With 72% of the world's population needing a visa when travelling to Europe, lack of progress on visa related issues will put at risk the potential for growth, especially from the fastest growing inbound markets, notably China and Russia. A study by UNWTO/WTTC on the impact of easing visa facilitation shows that it can lead to an influx of 5-25%.

Many Member States have already put in place measures at a local level to facilitate visa processes in order to attract more visitors from important source markets but there is a puzzling lack of consistency and formal agreement from Governments when it comes to revising the rules. Firstly, for example, some countries offer a multi-entry visa with long term validity to frequent travelers who have proven their integrity and reliability, through indicators such as regular use of a previous visa. However, despite this, many Member States are still reluctant to introduce multiple entry visas (MEVs) valid for three years and subsequently for five years for 'VIS registered regular' travelers, i.e. applicants whose data are registered in the Visa Information System (VIS) and who have previously lawfully used at least two visas within the past 12 month period.

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Secondly, the proposal recommends a reduction in the deadline for processing and making the decision on a visa application from 15 to 10 days. There seems to be opposition to the formal acceptance of this rule adoption, whilst many Member States can actually process a visa within 72 hours. It is not therefore clear why this rule cannot be adopted formally when the physical reality suggests it can easily be achieved.

Kent Nyström, President of HOTREC commented: "We do understand the need to have a visa system that protects our citizens, but we also need a visa system that is more consumer friendly, since the vast majority of visa applicants are tourists, business travelers and people wishing to visit their family".

Said Tom Jenkins, CEO of ETOA: "Above all, visa requirements must be rational and respectful. If Member States consider a particular origin market a risk they should say why and institute appropriate controls. But it makes no sense to compromise Europe's appeal in origin worldwide markets by treating tens of millions of prospective visitors as if they were suspected criminals. Security matters must be intelligence-led; this approach is strangely absent when it comes to visas."

The industry requests Tourism and Culture Ministers to ensure that the tourism and travel dimension - and its economic impact – are taken into account in the Council's discussions. The benefits of facilitating visas are well known. A recent Commission study determined that more flexible and accessible visa rules could lead to an increase in trips to the Schengen area of between 30% and 60% from only six target countries that represent important tourism source markets. Maintaining the status quo could cost the EU as much as €130 billion in total direct spending over five years (in accommodation, food and drink, transports, entertainment, shopping, etc.), vital activity that could generate 1.3 million jobs in tourism and related sectors.

Said Mr. Lars Thykier, President of ECTAA: "Tourism Ministers must make some more noise on the benefits of improved visa rules on tourism, which is one of the major industries generating economic growth and employment." He added: "Two of the three most important European source markets of international arrivals require a Schengen visa, notably China and Russia. Europe cannot afford 'business as usual' while other destinations have acknowledged the benefits of visa facilitations and making visa applications simpler and more affordable - in other words, more attractive."

Factsheet enclosed

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NET, the Network for the European Private Sector in Tourism is a contact group of pan-European trade associations. Our members are: [CLIA](#), [ECTAA](#), [EFCO&HPA](#), [ETOA](#), [HOTREC](#), [IAAPA](#), [IRU](#). NET's purpose is to develop common goals for the tourism industry and work with policy makers and other partners to achieve them. For more information please email one of the NET members.

Press contacts of member associations:

[CLIA Europe](#) Tomas Matesanz, +32 2 471 857 331, tomas.matesanz@cruisecouncil.eu

[ECTAA](#) Christina Russe, +32 2 644 34 50, crusse@ectaa.eu

[EFCO&HPA](#) Helen Charlesworth, +44 1452 526911, h.charlesworth@bhpha.org.uk

[ETOA](#) Tim Fairhurst, +44 20 7499 4412, tfairhurst@etoa.org

[HOTREC](#) Marta Machado, +32 2 5136323, marta.machado@hotrec.eu

[IAAPA](#) Kieran O'Keeffe, +32 2 213 13 00, kieran.okeeffe@interelgroup.com

[IRU](#) Stuart Colley, +32 2 743 25 84, stuart.colley@iru.org