

Relaunching Mediterranean Cooperation on Tourism

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Mediterranean Charter

Tourism continues to beat records in 2006 with 842 million arrivals and over 4.5% growth. This will have been an excellent year in the Mediterranean Basin, despite a certain slowdown in the Middle East due to events in Lebanon, with an overall growth rate of approximately 5%, broken down to 5.8% for North Africa, 4% for the Middle East and 4.6% for Mediterranean Europe. An in-depth analysis of the statistics published also shows highly encouraging results: seasonal distribution has improved over preceding years; new products and services, often using new information and communication technologies, were launched everywhere; destinations emerged in the southern and eastern areas of the Basin; and the sector is creating more and more employment. It is no longer only the beaches that attract holidaymakers and other visitors. The Mediterranean will not become Europe's swimming pool, as one of the scenarios in the Blue Plan (United Nations Environment Programme, Mediterranean Action Plan UNEP/MAP) supposed in the 1980s. Nevertheless, it remains an environmentally fragile region and the first effects of climate change are beginning to be felt: persistent droughts, disappearance of wetlands, appearance of tropical animal species, etc.

A Record Year

On the whole, the Mediterranean countries, with the exception of the Middle East, have beat records. Spain, for instance, registered over 58.5 million international tourist arrivals – 2.5 million more than the preceding year. Other countries along the northern shore of the

Mediterranean experienced similar success.

The growth of tourism in North Africa has been accelerating since 2003: Morocco (+9.3% in 2006 as compared to 2005) and Tunisia (+2.6%) have far surpassed 6 million tourist arrivals in 2006. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Morocco obtained nearly 65% of tourism revenue in the region, against only 30% by Tunisia. In Morocco, it seems that the implementation of the "Vision 2010" plan will meet its objectives and will have significant effects on major aspects of the country's macroeconomic equilibrium, namely:

- Fostering additional GDP growth, on the order of 2-3 points per year;
- The creation of approximately 600,000 jobs; and
- An annual revenue growth in local currency from approximately 20 to 80 billion dirhams (1 dirham = €0.0902).

In Tunisia, the aim is to consolidate the results obtained and improve the quality of existing products and services, hence the interest in thalassotherapy and fitness holidays. Turkey, today the 9th tourist destination in the world, has consolidated its position as the 4th destination in the Mediterranean after France, Spain and Italy and the 6th destination in Europe. Egypt, with over 8 million international tourist arrivals and Jordan, with over 3 million, are destinations experiencing particular success.

If peace had continued to reign in Lebanon, growth would have been even more impressive: in the first semester of 2006, this country experienced an increase of +49% in international tourism! In July, all of this was shattered. The hope remains that the situation will stabilise in 2007. The UNWTO is actively contributing to this stabilisation. Due to the assassination of a Lebanese political leader, however, it had to postpone the International Conference on

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Partnerships to Enhance Tourism Safety and Security in the Middle East and North Africa, originally slated to take place on 6th and 7th December 2006 in Beirut but now programmed for the same date as the 29th Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for the Middle East, i.e. the second quarter of 2007.

Challenges and Threats

These events reflect the current situation: the divide continues to increase between the northern and eastern/southern shores of the Mediterranean. The good growth rate of certain destinations in the south such as Morocco will not be able to compensate for the lack of perspective and global policies. The war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 had disastrous consequences on tourism in the entire subregion: Israel, Syria and Jordan were affected as well. At the same time, 'safe-haven' destinations in southern Europe became consolidated, such as Andalusia in Spain, the Côte d'Azur in France and the Costa Smeralda in Sardinia, Italy, for upper class customers from North African and Middle East countries.

2006 will also have been the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, and a number of seminars and meetings have been held on the Saharan and Middle-Eastern deserts, as for instance the one held in Elche/Elx, Spain in mid-December 2006: the 1st International Congress on Oasis and Sustainable Tourism, organised by the association, La Cultura del Oasis, with the participation of the UNWTO, UNESCO and UNEP. The fragility of semi-desert and desert regions in conjunction with climate change and the persistence of drought will have serious impacts on countries having essentially focussed on this type of products. Algeria and Libya will have to make additional efforts to open their borders and define tourism policies that are clearly orientated towards the creation of employment, that is, along the Mediterranean coast and not in the large southern Saharan area, highly vulnerable on an environmental level and whose capacity remains limited. Water shortage will be the Damocles' sword hanging over the entire Mediterranean region, and the desalination

of seawater will be but a partial solution, decreasingly expensive but entailing environmental dangers of its own.

Challenges and threats were at the heart of debate on the 4th and 5th May 2006 in Barcelona, at the first MEDA TOURISM FORUM, a meeting of world business leaders and Mediterranean tourism policymakers. Another conference under the lemma, "Tourism and Change: Mediterranean Challenges," was organised in Tunisia by ASCAME (Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and presided by Jilani Ben'marek. It attracted one hundred or so businesspeople. At this conference, a study published in April 2006 by Anima, the Euro-Mediterranean Network of Investment Promotion Agencies, was presented (Hatem, F., La filière tourisme dans les pays méditerranéens, www.animaweb.org/Documents/Tourisme.pdf).

The Anima network's activity was made permanent by the European Commission after the 2005 Barcelona Summit. According to the authors of the study, tourism will be one of the prime investment sectors in the Mediterranean: *"The southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean attract less than 50 million tourists per year (6% of the world's tourism in 2004). The opportunities are enormous, in particular for countries that are as yet little frequented, such as Algeria, Libya and Syria. Yet the pitfalls of mass tourism must be avoided – destruction of outstanding sites, intense development of shorelines and destabilisation of cultures. The experience of European countries in this regard is priceless."* At the same time, certain analysts emphasise that, though it is a single Mediterranean region, it does not have a unified image, much less so a common trademark. It is thus necessary to cooperate!

Realistic Hopes for Mediterranean Tourism Cooperation

2006 will have been, above all, the year of relaunching Mediterranean cooperation on tourism, an excellent opportunity for the Barcelona Process. The European approach, structured on the three pillars of the Barcelona Process of 1995 – the political / security, economic and social / cultural pillars – aimed to create tourism cooperation instruments, though it did not really succeed between 1995 and 2006. At the Rabat Conference in Morocco in 1996, participants lacked the consensus necessary to establish a structure

acceptable to the majority of actors and set up a work programme. Furthermore, the attempt to create a tourism organisation for the Middle East including Israel was unproductive.

Nevertheless, tourism was included on the majority of MEDA programmes and initiatives, such as the LIFE programme for the environment or EUMEDIS initiative for information and communication technologies. Since the creation of the FEMIP (Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership, part of the European Investment Bank) in October of 2002, tourism has been considered one of the main sectors to foster in order to facilitate access of SMEs to funding and support regional cooperation projects (South-South cooperation) and those of joint interest to the EU and the MPCs.

In 2005, the Declaration “in favour of a joint vision of progress and solidarity within the framework of the Mediterranean Partnership,” adopted at the 12th ministerial conference (Hammamet, Tunisia, 1st and 2th October 2005) of the Mediterranean Forum, which brought together Ministers of Foreign Affairs from 12 Mediterranean countries, called for fostering Euro-Mediterranean tourism cooperation by “including aspects of tourism in the different Euro-Mediterranean programmes with a view to fostering sustainable development and establishing training programmes on tourism in the Mediterranean countries.”

In late November 2005, the Euro-Mediterranean Summit organised to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process was concluded. On this occasion, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership leaders reiterated their intention to establish a common space of peace, stability and prosperity “in total synergy with and complementary to” the action plans of the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). For the first time, heads of state took tourism cooperation into consideration as a factor contributing to the advent of an area of joint economic development, to be achieved, on the one hand, by complying with the engagement of creating a Euro-Mediterranean free

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trade area, and on the other, by promoting a vast policy of economic development and equitable, sustainable employment. The final declaration made by British Prime Minister Blair contained highly favourable comments on Mediterranean tourism.

Multiplication of Initiatives in 2006

The multiplication of initiatives occurring in 2006 demonstrated the great vitality of this cooperation in both the public and private sectors and the will to develop concrete projects. These projects, in turn, require increasing coherence, cohesion and coordination.

Thus, a Mediterranean Tourism Association (META) was created. The private sector certainly needed to take the initiative again: it therefore organised a sort of Mediterranean ‘PATA’ (Pacific Asia Travel Association) whose headquarters would be in Marseille or Madrid and would receive the support of major tour operators, airline companies and cruise companies. The Mediterranean tourism industry consists of small and medium-sized enterprises; indeed, 95% are micro-businesses. Certainly, major projects could structure local and regional tourism within the framework of sustainable development. In the majority of cases, these projects involve North-South rather than South-South relations. Japanese tourists travel the Andalusia and northern Morocco circuit or the Sicily and Tunis circuit, and not a Tunisia - Algeria circuit or a Morocco - Mauritania - Algeria circuit. At the International Seminar, “From the Coast of No Maghreb to the North African Tiger,” held on 25th-26th May in Madrid, debate was generated on “the economic, political and social impact of a regional airline company with private capital.” Is this merely political speculation? No, as such liberty would allow north-south movement of populating and capital to be approached from a new perspective, that of a strategy beneficial to the Maghreb and, in a more general manner, to both shores of the western Mediterranean Basin.

By the same token, the Blue Plan (UNEP – Mediterranean Action Plan), in pursuing its macro-economic and forecasting work on Mediterranean affairs, organised an experts’ workshop on tourism for the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) on 23rd-24th March 2006, with the participation of the UNWTO, focussing on recommendations to foster sustainable development and environmental protection in the Mediterranean region.

Finally, with regard to civil society, such associations and organisations as the Mediterranean Charter Organization (Carta Mediterránea) have included tourism on their agenda to foster co-development, and the International Seminar on Co-Development (hosted by Carta Mediterránea and BBK) held in Madrid on 16th-18th November 2006 considered tourism one of the sectors with good practices for Mediterranean co-development.

The Feasibility of Dialogue among 5+5 Countries

Tunisia's initiative was highly significant – it organised a conference on the 5th-6th May 2006 in Yasmine Hammamet for the Ministers of Tourism of the “5+5 Dialogue” countries of the western Mediterranean Basin, with the collaboration of the UN World Tourism Organization. It was established that cooperation on tourism, at first on a subregional level, would be effective in the fields of employment, infrastructure development, co-development, cultural dialogue and the alliance of civilisations. In view of the difficulties experienced in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on tourism, the impossibility of uniting all Mediterranean countries including Israel under a single organisation, and above all, the relations already existing among western Mediterranean countries, this perspective is more

realistic and would have a greater chance of meeting its goals, according to certain observers.

The Hammamet 5+5 Declaration adopted on 6th May 2006 advocates tourism as a tool for fostering tolerance, comprehension, rapprochement of cultures and sustainable development. It announces that endorsing parties are determined to promote cooperation and solidarity among both shores of the Western Mediterranean for partnership in the various spheres of tourism, and that professional training and service quality are two fundamentals of the tourism business. It also indicates that tourism cooperation is more necessary than ever in the western Mediterranean region. This solution may be adopted in the near future if a consensus is reached by the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries on using tourism as an element for building confidence among them. It is apparently backed by France, whose influence continues to be significant in North Africa.

The Alicante Declaration and Tourism

The issue of tourism cooperation was taken up again at a larger forum: the 13th ordinary meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Mediterranean Forum countries (held in Alicante, Spain, on 28th October 2006), which brought ministers together in a spirit of partnership and continuity. At the meeting, participants discussed the role of tourism as a motor, as a vehicle for socio-

THE MAIN POINTS OF THE HAMMAMET 5+5 DIALOGUE DECLARATION

Towards tourism as a tool for fostering cultural rapprochement and sustainable development

We, the Ministers of the 5+5 Dialogue countries (...):
(...)

- In the conviction that tourism is a motor for economic and social development, as well as a vehicle for fostering rapprochement, comprehension and tolerance among peoples;
- Determined to promote cooperation and solidarity among the Western Mediterranean countries on both the northern and southern shores, in order to build partnership in the various spheres of tourism;
- Profoundly convinced that development initiatives should be in keeping with the logic of both national and regional development, as well as of decentralised international cooperation, making regions and municipalities sustainable socio-economic axes;
- Convinced that professional training and service quality remain two fundamental pillars of the tourism trade (...)

Hereby declare:

(...)

- Our determination to cooperate with all pertinent national, regional and international institutions whose aim is to support tourism development in our region, in particular the UN World Tourism Organization;

- Our commitment to take action towards a harmonised policy to develop solidary, sustainable tourism in our region, within the framework of the conventions and principles to which we subscribe, in particular by:

(...)

- Studying the establishment of a training and research mechanism for tourism in the Mediterranean; (...)
- Exploring triangular cooperation niches in the tourism industry among southern and northern countries through appropriate mechanisms;
- Including courses to raise awareness on environmental issues in hotel and tourism education programmes.
- Our conviction that tourism should contribute to raising international awareness on the region's human, natural and cultural potential, both beyond the region and within it, and to this effect, we recommend:
- Studying the opportunity to establish an instrument adding value to the image of western Mediterranean civilisations, (...)
- Encouraging the organisation of a series of events fostering communication among university communities of the Member States of the 5+5 Dialogue. The first of these events will be a forum on “Tourism, a Vehicle for Cultural Rapprochement and Tolerance,” to be held in Tunisia in 2007. (...)

economic and cultural development fostering rapprochement, comprehension and open-mindedness among different peoples, and also as a source of enrichment, insofar as it generates significant perspectives for direct and indirect employment. The Member States thus expressed their will to strengthen this important sector.

The informal document drawn up by Tunisia and Spain at the forum emphasised that:

"The Mediterranean tourism industry primarily consists of small and medium-sized companies, 95% of them being micro-businesses, and major projects could structure local and regional tourism within the framework of sustainable development;

- *Tourism cannot develop without a climate of trust and security;*
- *Education and training are the pillars of quality and sustainability for the tourism sector, which is undoubtedly the top economic sector in the Mediterranean region."*

It recommends that, in view of the progress made since the 12th session in 2005:

"It would be highly recommendable to consider creating a regional training and research institution for tourism in the Mediterranean and then fostering partnership relations between this institution and other training structures existing in the region. This proposition should be accompanied by an initiative to identify opportunities for joint investment and intensification of partnerships in this field, with the essential and necessary participation of the private sector."

The ministerial meeting also called for immediate implementation of measures to:

- Facilitate the organisation of travelling exhibitions and cultural tourism weeks in order to raise awareness of the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the civilisations of our respective countries and of the Mediterranean region as a whole;
- Organise joint events, in particular, a periodical forum for partnership in the tourism sector;
- Jointly promote combined tourism products for distant countries;
- Exchange expertise and savoir-faire in the sphere of exploring new markets."

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs encouraged *"the UN World Tourism Organization and its members from the Mediterranean region to pursue coordination efforts in order to increase the efficiency and coherence of joint Mediterranean initiatives and to work towards a harmonised policy for the sustainable and solidary*

development of tourism, in keeping with the existing conventions and principles of respect and dialogue among all Mediterranean peoples."

In the final declaration made at Alicante on 29th October 2006, the Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign

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Affairs reiterated the ensemble of these recommendations. The terms of the Final Declaration were taken up a month later at the 8th Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Tampere, Finland, 27th - 28th November 2006).

At this meeting, the Ministers of the countries involved in the Barcelona Process (27 European countries and the 10 MEDA countries plus Libya and Mauritania as observers) referred to the results of the Barcelona Summit of November 2005 and discussed a preliminary work programme for 2007 designed to develop new initiatives, in particular in the fields of higher education, employment, health, tourism, fostering investment, migration and intercultural dialogue. The Final Declaration discusses tourism in Section V: "Environment and Tourism," under Paragraph 29. According to this paragraph, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs:

"underline the importance of the contribution of tourism to the economies of the Euromed Partners. They recall that at the Barcelona Summit, the Heads of States and Governments agreed upon cooperating to 'enhance the impact of tourism on job creation, infrastructure development and intercultural understanding, while ensuring environmental sustainability.' In this respect, they welcome Morocco's offer to host a Euromed ministerial meeting on tourism and mandate Senior Officials to work on its preparation."

An Instrument for Consensus and Cooperation on Tourism in the Mediterranean by 2007/2008?

The Mediterranean cannot long remain one of the rare regions of the world that does not have an instrument

of its own for consensus and cooperation in the field of tourism. This type of structure exists in Asia, the Caribbean and Europe. Certainly, the UNWTO has endeavoured to foster cooperation in Northern Africa and the Middle East through two of its commissions. Publications and statistics with marketing and forecasting aims have been published to this effect. Meetings have been and will continue to be organised to ensure cooperation in the struggle against terrorism, major pandemics such as AIDS or the threat of avian influenza, and travel advisories. Furthermore, projects have been prepared with the aim of organising the Euro-Mediterranean information and communications technologies sphere and training agents.

Without a specific institution, this cooperation will not operate efficiently. This time, the European Commission and the governments participating in the Barcelona Process have grasped this. The question remains of whether it will be created within the subregional framework of the 5+5 Dialogue countries or within the global framework of the Mediterranean Basin – stretching from Mauritania to Jordan and which should also include the countries emerging from former Yugoslavia as well as Albania and the Principalities of Andorra, Monaco and The Republic of San Marino. 2007-2008 will be the decisive years. The hesitation to tackle the non-economic dimensions of this cooperation will also have to be overcome!

How can we overcome age-old fears, fears too often linked to a marketing vision of the Mediterranean?

All sustainable development demands a long-term, 'win-win' strategic perspective and not a short-term one aiming at quick profits. Cooperation is not just a means of allowing northern enterprise to expand into the south. Cooperation has other aims as well, in particular that of attaining the material as well as spiritual well-being of populations on both shores of the Mediterranean.

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This is why the idea of making tourism one of the vectors of the Alliance of Civilisations has met with everyone's satisfaction. The UNWTO, in its function as agency of the United Nations in charge of tourism affairs, will manage the Alliance's action programme, which will begin, as announced by the UNWTO's Secretary-General, Francesco Frangialli, with a World Summit on Tourism and Religion, under the auspices of the Spanish government and the high patronage of the King of Spain. Participants will discuss the means by which to strengthen ties between tourism and the major world religions so as to foster development in peace and intercultural dialogue. The Summit will be held in the autumn of 2007 in Cordoba, Spain.