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Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
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COR OPINION ON TOURISM AS DRIVING FORCE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION ACROSS THE EU

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CONTRIBUTION OF AEBR

1. General

The AEBR welcomes this initiative of the CoR and refers to current and general aspects, which influence tourism:

- The changed **demography** has to be taken into account, also with regard to the growing part of senior citizens.
- The **demands on tourism** have changed; above all due to the fact that today's tourists have higher and altered demands.
- The tourist destinations in Europe are in a **competition** with touristy efforts in neighbouring non Member States and other continents.
- In some regions, the offers are further developed on the one side of the border than on the other and there is also a **lack of coordination**.
- **On the one hand**, a **free border crossing** is conducive to cross-border tourism, but **on the other hand**, the **security has to be improved** because **tourism and uncontrolled migration** are an acute threat in border regions, too.

AEBR stresses the following **points** as **particularly important** for a further positive development of tourism in border and cross-border regions:

- **classification** of tourist services,
- **determination and harmonisation of jobs** in the tourism sector in order to avoid confusing customers,
- special rules for and simplification of **VAT**,
- Also in future, tourism should be considered one of the strategic elements of regional development in the operational programmes of Interreg as well as ENPI and IPA.

Based on its repeatedly revised **action programme** for border and cross-border regions, AEBR recommends the following:

2. Tourism as location factor

Tourism is a **key factor** in measures designed **to develop a region's economy**; it also provides large numbers of jobs.

Furthermore, tourism helps to **exploit** many of the **development opportunities** that are **typical for border areas** and to **overcome weaknesses**. It facilitates economic diversification, creates additional new employment possibilities and new qualifications, helps to maintain local natural and cultural heritage, and improves the quality and quantity of establishments, services and infrastructure.

The environmental quality and type of landscape of a region (air, water, the nature of the landscape itself, buildings and infrastructure) are key factors that play just as vital a role in determining an area's tourism potential as the type of tourism envisaged. They are also important for determining the quality of what tourists are offered and for the type of visitor target groups. This applies to the development of tourism in rural areas.

3. Special measures and recommendations

The following **measures** are recommended for the **development of cross-border tourism**:

- ***in the context of regional development:***
 - **Taking account** of tourism in **regional and cross-border development plans** with a view to promoting economic diversification, creating new and additional employment possibilities and new qualifications;
 - planning and securing the **sustainable development** of tourism, e.g. by developing cross-border tourism concepts and/or free space concepts;
 - **overcoming competition on either side of a border** by developing cross-border tourism concepts with a wide range of shared facilities and services on offer so as to guarantee guests a comprehensive service of high quality:
 - firstly for the respective border region;
 - then for the cross-border region;
 - and if possible to make them stay longer and establish ties with the area;
 - developing cross-border tourism by making optimal use of the endogenous potential to complement existing economic activities on either side of the border;
 - developing tourism as instrument to address **the typical development needs and weaknesses of border regions**: promoting economic diversification, creating new employment opportunities and side jobs. Tourism may also be helpful in investing in new know-how, nature and the preservation of culture, in improving the services level and the quantity and quality of the infrastructure.
 - **avoiding excessive dependency** on specific forms of tourism (mass tourism), which can create new burdens and imbalances in the structure of the regional economy;
 - paying closer **attention to the indirect potential impact** of tourism (e.g. creating new markets for local products and services);
 - **avoiding disadvantages** associated with the development of tourism (especially in remote rural areas) e.g. situations in which the financial gains and employment-related benefits are lost, owing to dependency on external organisers, transport and travel com-

panies, whose activities do not benefit regional and/or local companies in the respective border regions.

- Increased attention on key factors such as **environment and the type of agriculture** in the region (air, water, nature of landscape, buildings, infrastructure) for tourism potential in the region as well as on the nature of **possible tourism** (e.g. either mass tourism in coastal areas in the summer and “winter” tourism in the mountainous areas, or foreign “niche” tourism based on cultural heritage, including certain types of activities or rural tourism) and the **type of visitor groups**. The same applies to tourism development based either on mass or “niche” tourism in rural areas or city tourism based on culture, historical heritage and leisure services.

- **Transport:**
 - The national and cross-border **expansion of infrastructures and services** (the road network, railways, airports, telecoms, information centres for guests, providers of accommodation, leisure facilities, health care providers, shopping facilities), thus paving the way and guaranteeing sustainable development of tourism in competition with other regions.
 - The **quality of the products** and services connected with tourism has to be improved, and the traffic and economic infrastructures expanded, first of all, to improve the attainability of the tourist area, and to facilitate crossing borders and the local public transportation, with the objective of extending the season and the duration of the tourist visits.
 - **Internal connections and infrastructures** should be built or improved (including border crossing points on roads, bicycle and hiking routes, local public passenger transportation, services and accommodation networks).

- **Marketing:**
 - Unmistakable shaping of the **tourism profile** and image of cross-border regions;
 - exploitation the possible strengths of a cross-border region, so as to sensibly plan and finance **investments** in infrastructure and services for tourists;
 - paying special attention to the **quality requirements** of core and target groups of visitors;
 - building up **knowledge of the market and skills**, so as to be constantly informed about the development of tourism products and successfully offer cross-border tourism to target markets;
 - **checking** the quality of tourism **services** and the development of new, high-quality tourism products so as to be capable of weighing **external needs against the internal allocation of resources**;

- building up and extending **cross-border information, contacts and networks** and also joint marketing by the respective tourism associations and other organisations, including private companies.

- **Natural environment and agriculture**
 - Creating services that **strengthen soft eco-tourism**, especially in conjunction with the long-term guaranteeing of sustainable forms of cross-border, environmentally compatible rural development;
 - Concentrating on promoting activities that enable the **harmonious coexistence** of tourism and favourable environmental conditions and pave the way for an environmentally compatible form of region-specific agriculture;
 - Promoting greater use of **synergies** between tourism, agriculture and forestry, environmental policy and SMEs;
 - **Avoiding activities** that are damaging to the environment, deplete natural resources or undermine the conditions required for specific regional agricultural production;
 - Providing **joint, bilingual information** and devising **measures** designed to entice people seeking a refreshing change back to nature and the countryside, whilst also offering appropriate education or training in a bid to prevent the environment, landscape and agriculture from being spoilt or damaged.

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