

I would like to congratulate the organisers of this inter-parliamentary conference, since we consider this to be a crucially important topic. The challenges of Sustainable Tourism are an extremely important topic for Europe and for my country: Portugal. In fact, it is one of the most exported sectors in Portugal. It represents almost 13% of our exports and more than 45% of our exports of services. It represents almost 8% of the GDP and is fundamentally important in terms of employment.

These are excellent reasons to give it extra attention, in light of its importance for the national economy. Furthermore, as we know, it is a sector with a great capacity for generating development, even in regions outside beach areas, and so it has added interest for local development.

Aspects such as culture and the environment are incredibly important and, in Portugal, both nature tourism and cultural tourism are developing sectors and segments that should receive special attention, so we can achieve a greater diversification of products and, at the same time, so we can make the most of the extraordinary resources in the different regions of our country.

These issues are also crucial for Europe, in my opinion, since Europe must know how to make the best use of its resources. It is an old continent with history and therefore has enormous potential for cultural tourism, but it is also a place where environmental-protection issues have led to demanding rules, established in legislation.

Hotels and restaurants therefore adopt those laws, today, as a mark of quality, which helps customers to make their choices. All hotel chains bear these things in mind and use them in their marketing. And of course, Portugal, in that respect, also has some of the best quality standards.

I recall that the numbers have been impressive this year, especially when we consider that we are still experiencing a historical crisis. However, as we know, tourism is one of the first sectors to leave the crisis and it has undoubtedly had an extraordinary capacity for resistance.

Numbers: overnight stays, guests, exports

Difficulties: in terms of domestic tourism and tourism in other regions of the country, with products that are newer and not as well known

There is a need to increase the average stay, capitalising on groups who wish to get to know the real country, our traditions and culture.

Portugal has legislation covering protected areas, areas where the rules in legislation are very strict, both in terms of the possibility of building and in terms of compliance with norms. This legislation relates to, for example, permission to sail in protected areas, such as the International Tagus (river between Portugal and Spain), which has highly important heritage in flora and fauna. It is a place where there are birds that need protection and where it is possible to observe them in their natural habitat.

The challenge is actually creating a balance between economic activity and protecting nature, in view of the means and modern technologies that exist today. We believe that this challenge joins others, such as rapid desertification in some areas, which causes terrible consequences by creating imbalances in the country and at the same time harmful consequences for the environment. We know that when people are not present in certain areas, forest fires, which are a real tragedy, occur more often and take on avoidable proportions.

The matters of simplifying, removing bureaucracy and reducing costs in this field deserve specific attention, since they may improve the competitiveness of tourism products.

And I cannot fail to mention that competitiveness can also be highly affected by the tax imposed on the sector, since nation-level choices in that area also make it possible to provide more attractive conditions in terms of competitiveness with other countries, even those outside Europe.

Safety conditions also have a great impact on the ability to attract tourist flows. Portugal has extraordinary conditions in this field, for its climate of peace and the welcome given by Portuguese people.

Croatia is a country with enormous potential and one where tourism certainly has a noteworthy role, considering its natural and environmental resources, and in light of its cultural heritage.

I am grateful for the idea to organise this conference, which is undoubtedly an excellent opportunity to examine the topic that brings us here, and I hope to have the chance to better get to know our host country.

Thank you all.

Hortense Martins

MP, Portuguese Parliament

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Croatia