

Interview with Mr. Alfred Gajdosik, Vice-President Group III, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)



Mr. Alfred Gajdosik is Vice-President Group III at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). HOTREC asked him to discuss the 2019 EESC opinion on International Trade and Tourism on which he was rapporteur.

1) On 26 September 2019, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted in plenary session your report on “International Trade and tourism – a global sustainable development agenda”. Can you present briefly

the main conclusions of your report, especially concerning sustainability, overtourism or digitalisation?

I had the honour to be rapporteur on the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) opinion ([REX/521-EESC-2019](#)) dealing with Tourism and Sustainability. In this opinion, EESC focused on the main relations between tourism, the European economy, sustainability, digitalisation, overtourism and other relevant issue for the sector (e.g. use of online platforms, such as Airbnb).

As we all know, tourism is the 3rd largest sector in the international balance of trade, accounting in Europe for 10.3% of GDP and holding a great potential to create new jobs – mostly within SMEs. The sector is growing at a faster rate compared to the overall European economy, acting as a key driver of economic growth – also embracing international trade, distribution, all areas of public and private sectors, agriculture and transport. Together with International Trade – with whom tourism holds very complex ties – this sector must therefore be considered a determining factor in the achievement of the [UN goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

For these reasons, the EESC finds regrettable that a separate objective for tourism has yet not been included in the [European Structural and Investment Funds Regulations](#) – being considered as a mean or sector only. Financial planning, in fact, must be considered a key factor to the implementation of political priorities, whereas budget must be recognised as the most efficient mean of policy implementation. The EESC calls therefore on a revision of the most recent proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, claiming a separate budget line for tourism.

Furthermore, EESC identified a close link between tourism’s competitiveness and sustainability, which is largely dependent in this sector on various factors, such as the use of clean energy and the protection of cultural heritage. In the opinion we would like to point out how tourism is one of the key sectors in the [10 years framework of programmes on sustainable production](#) (10-year YFP) and has the potential to become not only the standard for the industry as a whole, but also to involve national economies at worldwide level.

The EESC opinion finally focuses on two of the main challenges currently facing the industry: digitalisation and overtourism. The first will play an important role in innovative forms of cooperation in the sector and will significantly impact on the development of tourist destinations. Many modern technologies (e.g. Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and blockchains), in fact, have the potential to make even the remotest of locations interesting. But to make the most of such capability, the tourism sector needs to focus on research and development. As for overtourism, this phenomenon is already a threat to some European regions – jeopardising both the quality of life of locals and the environment. Although not being a “recent” issue, overtourism still lacks a uniform definition and the term is therefore not easy to be applied.



2) On the basis of your report and the hearing organised by the European Economic and Social Committee on this topic last 14 June by EESC study group on International Trade and Tourism - A Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, what are the main recommendations you would address to the hospitality and tourism sector to overcome the challenges linked to skills shortage or sustainability?

The tourism sector is very diverse in terms of training requirements as, in view of market developments and rising consumer expectations, these can range from relevant language and computer skills to economic and advanced IT skills and also gastronomic knowledge.

Moreover, different EU countries will also have different forms of education and training paths of varying duration, making mutual recognition even more difficult.

For these reasons, I believe that the identification of certain training standards could improve the career opportunities of various professionals both in the EU and abroad. In fact, it will only be possible to permanently reduce the shortage of skills in the tourism sector by introducing binding training requirements while of course improving basic conditions in the industry.

Promoting the value of jobs in tourism as a long-term career option would also be greatly beneficial, as working conditions in tourism are often more difficult than in other sectors.