

Intervention at the Fourth T20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting on

"Tourism as an alternative to job creation – the impact of visa facilitation on job creation in the tourism sector"

Merida, 16thMay20112



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Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Industry and Entrepreneurship

Honourable Minister Guevara,

Dear UNWTO Secretary-General [Taleb RIFAI],

Dear WTTC President [David Scowsill],

Excellencies,

Distinguished High Representatives of the tourism sector,

Let me start by thanking Minister Guevara for the warm Mexican hospitality and for the excellent organisation of this fourth T20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic for our discussion today [**“Tourism as an alternative to job creation”**] is one of great importance and particular relevance especially today when our countries are called more than ever to find solutions to strength economic growth and boost employment. It is now, more than ever, the moment for us to underline that tourism creates jobs and contributes to sustained growth throughout the world.

The contribution of this sector to our economies is not yet fully exploited and, if we take the appropriate measures, we will be able to achieve immediate results.

Travel facilitation is closely interlinked with tourism development and can be a tool to increase demand.

In spite of the many measures taken in recent decades to facilitate tourist travel in many regions of the world, there is still room for considerable progress, amongst others, by taking further action on visa facilitation and improving visa regimes and procedures.

I read with interest the results of the research carried out by Oxford Economics on the impact of visa facilitation on job creation in the G20 economies.. It is indeed vital that we substantiate our proposals with strong and relevant data. Proving that smarter visa policies can attract more tourists and should create jobs is the key for the credibility of our message.

The European Union has already a certain experience in this regard with its Schengen area and common EU visa policy.

The border-free Schengen area, set up as an intergovernmental initiative in 1985, has now become an integral part of the EU law. It is a great achievement. More than 420 million people are now residing in the area and enjoying the freedom to move seamlessly from one country to another, making some 1.25 billion journeys within the EU every year. This figure includes not just EU citizens but also numerous third-country nationals legally entitled to travel within 23 Member States of the Schengen area without going through passport checks.

The Schengen area is underpinned by a common EU visa policy. It took years and intense discussions for this policy to be in place and it is a great political achievement. To remain relevant, the system needs to be constantly improved and updated to take into account recent economic and social

evolutions. If in the past the EU visa policy was guided by the sole principle of public security and immigration control, I believe it should also take into account the economic aspects of tourism and its impact on growth and jobs. More than ever, it is important to raise awareness with our Internal Affairs colleagues that visa facilitation can trigger substantial economic returns in terms of increased tourist visits, receipts and jobs. Needless to say, this should happen while keeping a high level of public security and maintaining the due control over irregular immigration. Security is paramount to all – especially to tourists.

I have expressed these same views to my colleague, Commissioner Malmstroem, in charge of visa policy and both our services will be cooperating to develop coherent and realistic visa and tourism policies that mutually benefit each other while safeguarding the security of the EU and its citizens.

I have listened to tourism industry stakeholders' grievances about EU burdensome visa procedures and I can assure you that I am doing my utmost to substantiate their viewpoint in the debate concerning visa facilitation options in view of next year's review of the EU Visa Code.

A possible contribution could come from an enhanced role of the Local Schengen Cooperation between the Member States' consulates, especially in key third countries.

It is equally important that Member States proactively implement the existing provisions including any visa facilitation measure allowed under the current law. I am thinking for example of Poland, where the authorities have put in place a sort of "fast track procedure" for visa issuing in view of the European Football Championship in June this year.

I am convinced that other examples and good practices such as the Polish one exist. Such examples should be source of inspiration for other countries as well.

Last but not least, in an ever more globalised world driven by technological revolutions, it is crucial to acknowledge that Information and Communication

Technologies can have an important role in facilitating the visa-issuing procedures and shortening processing time. Indeed ICT could help in tackling some grievances of the tourism industry, thus enabling tourists which pose neither a risk for illegal immigration nor a danger to public security to obtain their visa as smoothly as possible.

It is my intention to put this topic on the agenda of the first meeting of the High-Level Group on “ICT and Tourism” that I launched in November 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think there is no doubt amongst ourselves that improving visa procedures represents an effective means to increase the flow of travellers and thus wealth for our economies and populations. This is the message that we need to send to our G20 world leaders for their consideration in their discussions about alternatives to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

Thank you for your attention!