

Main EU developments over the last three months of interest to the hotel, restaurant and café sector

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SOCIAL AFFAIRS

□ *Sunlight: a threat to workers' health and safety?*

Since 1989, the EU has adopted a wide-ranging body of health and safety legislation, covering most of the risks that could arise in a working environment. The most recent initiative deals with the protection of workers from exposure to optical radiation. The Council adopted a "common position" in first reading on 18 April 2005, which distinguishes between optical radiation from artificial and from natural sources, with the latter referring principally to solar radiation.

Under the Council text, employers are required, at suitable intervals, to make an assessment of the risks to workers from exposure to solar radiation. If the assessment indicates a risk, the employer shall devise an action plan including technical and organisational measures for reducing the risk to health and safety to a minimum. The employer should also ensure that his workers receive any necessary information and training relating to the outcome of the risk assessment.

On 12 July 2005, however, the European Parliament's Employment Committee voted against setting EU rules for the protection of workers against solar radiation. According to the Committee text, which was supported by members of the European People's Party and the Liberals, each Member State will have to decide on its own whether or not to take measures in this regard. The Socialists and Greens abstained as they did not agree with this solution.

The European Parliament plenary will vote on the Employment Committee's recommendation in the beginning of September. If the Committee recommendation is carried and the Council cannot approve it, a conciliation procedure between the European Parliament and the Council will take place.

HOTREC and several of its Member Associations wrote, prior to the vote, to the Members of the Employment Committee asking them to support amendments excluding the references to solar radiation in the Directive. In the view of HOTREC, the requirements in the Council text are disproportionate and would be burdensome for employers in the hospitality industry. Protection from sunlight should be an individual responsibility or should at any rate not be regulated at EU level.

HOTREC is therefore satisfied with the outcome of the Employment Committee's vote and hopes that the Council and Parliament will be able to agree on leaving the protection of workers against sunlight at national level.

□ *Working time: compromise hard to come by*

As previously reported in *Live from Brussels*, the European Commission proposed in September 2004 a revision of the working time Directive (2003/88), which notably provides for a maximum working week of 48 hours on average.

Recently, there have been two main developments in the negotiations on the European Commission proposal:

- the European Parliament adopted an opinion in first reading on 11 May 2005 (A6-0105/2005);
- the European Commission issued a revised proposal on 31 May 2005 (COM 2005/246).

The European Parliament opinion must be described as a success for the “rapporteur”, Mr. Alejandro Cercas (MEP, Socialist Group, Spain), since most of the amendments he had suggested were carried. The following deserve to be highlighted:

- the opt-out (i.e. the possibility for workers to agree to work more than 48 hours per week on average) should be repealed 36 months after the entry into force of the revised Directive;
- option for Member States to extend the reference period for calculating maximum average working time per week to 12 months. The employer is obliged to inform and consult with workers or their representatives before extending the reference period, and he must also take measures to remedy any associated health and safety risks;
- employers should, to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family, inform workers “*well in advance*” of any change in the working time pattern. Workers should also have the right to request changes to their hours and patterns of work, and the employer must consider these requests fairly; and
- on-call time, including the inactive part, is defined as working time.

In its revised proposal, the European Commission took on board several of the Parliament’s amendments, notably the ones relating to an annual reference period and to the reconciliation of work and family. On the opt-out, the European Commission proposes that Member States may continue using it for three years after the Directive’s entry into force. If they wish to keep the opt-out beyond this date, they must ask the European Commission for authorisation. The European Commission did not accept the Parliament amendment on the definition of on-call time.

In the legislative procedure, it is now up to the EU Council of Ministers to agree a “common position” on the revised proposal which the European Commission has submitted. The UK Presidency, which took over from Luxembourg on 1 July 2005, will have to deal with this issue during the autumn. A swift solution seems rather unlikely given the sharp differences between certain Member States, especially regarding the opt-out.

HOTREC supports a flexible working time Directive which would maintain the opt-out and provide for a 12-month reference period. HOTREC is also concerned about the Parliament’s amendments on the reconciliation of work and family and the definition of on-call time as working time.

HOTREC has expressed its position to members of the European Parliament Employment Committee.

INTERNAL MARKET FOR SERVICES

□ *Services Directive: a long road ahead*

As reported in previous issues of *Live from Brussels*, the European Commission issued in January 2004 a proposal for a Directive on services in the internal market (COM (2004) 2 final/3). This text includes provisions aiming at securing:

- the freedom of establishment for service providers;
- the free movement of services; and
- the quality of services.

The European Parliament is putting a lot of effort into reviewing the European Commission proposal. Eight different committees are submitting opinions. In the internal market committee, which is the committee principally responsible for the dossier, Members have filed almost 1 000 amendments!

Most of the discussion in Parliament concerns the scope of the Directive (i.e. which service activities should be excluded, for instance health services) and the country of origin principle (i.e. the European Commission proposal whereby a company providing a cross-border service should mainly be subject to the law of its home country). As far as the country of origin principle is concerned, the “rapporteur”, Ms. Evelyn Gebhardt (MEP, Socialist Group, Germany) has suggested replacing it with a “mutual recognition” principle, which would be less market liberalising (e.g. by providing for fewer cross-border service activities to fall under the laws of the home country).

It should be noted that the country of origin principle does not concern hotels and restaurants as these, with few exceptions, do not provide cross-border services.

A part of the European Commission proposal which has received less attention is the section on quality of services (Article 31). The European Commission would like the Member States to encourage service providers to be more transparent, for instance by providing information on the significance of quality labels. In a recital, the hotel business and classification is singled out as an area where more transparency is needed. The European Commission proposal also calls for more standards in the area of services.

The Parliament is aiming to adopt its opinion in first reading in October 2005.

HOTREC wrote to Mr. Malcolm Harbour and Mr. Toine Manders, coordinators for the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) respectively, in the internal market committee and asked their party groups to review Article 31 on the quality of services.

Ms. Marianne Thyssen (EPP, Belgium) submitted an amendment suggesting the deletion of the entire article 31 on the grounds that a Directive is not the right way of dealing with this issue. HOTREC would agree with this suggestion. HOTREC believes the issue of quality of services and the development of standards should be left to the industry and remain fully market-driven. There is no need for “encouragement” neither from the Member States nor from the European Commission in this regard.

The European Parliament Tourism Intergroup on 22 June 2005 focused on the impact of the services Directive in the tourism area. Mrs. Marguerite Sequaris expressed, on behalf of HOTREC, worry about the call for standards in the proposal and insisted that the procedure of drawing up standards must become more transparent. The working methods of standardisation bodies have to be thoroughly reviewed. The speech delivered on behalf of HOTREC is available on the HOTREC website.

STANDARDS

□ *New step towards more standards for services*

As explained in detail in previous issues of *Live from Brussels*, a new priority for the EU Institutions is the setting-up of a true single market for services. With this aim, the European Commission issued in January 2004 a proposal for a Directive on services in the internal market, which, among other measures, calls for the development of standards for services (see article under section Internal Market for Services). In parallel, in October 2003, the European Commission gave to CEN (European Committee for Standardisation) a first mandate “*to develop a standardisation work programme to support the internal market for the service sector*”.

As explained in *Live from Brussels N° 33*, CEN published this report in February 2005. The report insists on the development of standards in areas not yet dealt with at CEN level (new service areas) but also indicates that “*based on the national standardisation work identified, further projects could be proposed at the European level thus enabling the CEN members to work on common European standards*”.

On 19 July 2005, the European Commission forwarded to CEN a “*Second programming mandate in the field of services*”. By this new programming mandate, CEN is invited to work on “*projects, whether sectoral or horizontal, that look in depth at a particular service area, industry or process*”.

HOTREC will analyse very carefully the implications of this second mandate and discuss them within an internal seminar “A world of standards?” to be held in Vienna on 14 October 2005.

□ *CEN standard for swimming pools*

CEN Technical Committee 136 “*Sport & Playground*”, and more specifically its Working Group 8 “*Swimming pool equipment*”, has developed a standard on safety requirements for swimming pools. The draft standard (prEN 152888) consists of two parts:

- Part 1 - Safety requirements for design
- Part 2 - Safety requirements for operation

These documents are, in principle, to be submitted by CMC (CEN Managing Centre) to a public enquiry, which is to last 6 months.

As explained in *Live from Brussels N° 32*, the standard will cover hotel pools. The requirements appear less strict than originally feared.

HOTREC obtained “liaison status” with TC 136 at the beginning of 2005 and will circulate the enquiry on this draft standard to all its member associations as soon as it is made available.

TAXATION

□ *The VAT reduced rate saga*

The European Commission July 2003 proposal revised the current list of goods and services (Annex H to Directive 1992/77), to which Member States may choose to apply a reduced rate of VAT. The proposal provided for accommodation services to remain in Annex H and for restaurant services to be added to it. The European Parliament supported this European Commission proposal. However, in relation to VAT, the European Parliament can only express an opinion.

Notwithstanding its discussion in many meetings of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) between July 2003 and July 2005, the proposal could not be agreed by the Member States so far.

The most recent attempt to re-launch the debate was a compromise proposal drawn up by the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU in May 2005. The Luxembourg compromise proposed, among others, to create a flexible mechanism allowing Member States to request from the European Council, before the 1 January 2006, an authorisation to apply a reduced VAT rate to restaurants. This would be a transitional measure, valid until 31 December 2015. The Luxembourg compromise also proposed that the new Member States could continue until 31 December 2015 to apply reduced rates to those goods and services for which transitional arrangements had been agreed under the respective Accession Treaties. Under such treaties, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia had negotiated special arrangements for restaurants until 31 December 2007.

Unfortunately, ECOFIN failed to reach agreement on the Luxembourg Presidency's compromise.

The transitional special scheme on reduced rates for labour-intensive services, among which restaurant services were unfortunately not included, expires at the end of 2005. This deadline is likely to bring back the issue of reduced VAT rates in general, including VAT rates for restaurant services, on the table of ECOFIN in the coming months.

But, as it happened in the past, there is always the possibility that Member States decide to continue the “*special experiment for labour intensive services*” for some more years, without tackling the overall revision of reduced VAT rates.

HOTREC has always advocated the application of the lowest possible rate of VAT to accommodation and restaurant services in all Member States. HOTREC has been lobbying, since 1992, for the inclusion of all hospitality services in Annex H. For a more detailed report on the VAT saga, see on the HOTREC website our special report of 28 July 2005.

□ ***EU tax for airline tickets?***

The European Union is looking at ways to increase its development aid with the view to present a coordinated European position at the UN General Assembly in New York on 14-16 September 2005.

Since May 2005, ECOFIN is discussing the issue of a possible solidarity levy on airline tickets to finance development. The amount of this levy as well as its mandatory or voluntary character are still open.

Upon the invitation by ECOFIN to come forward with a technical analysis of the issue, the European Commission made public on 15 June 2005 a staff working paper entitled “*An analysis of a possible contribution based on airline tickets as a new source of financing development*” (SEC(2005)733).

The subject matter was not discussed in detail at the ECOFIN meeting on 12 July 2005.

Such a levy is likely to cause an increase in the costs of air tickets and could therefore have an impact on the demand for air travel. HOTREC member associations will discuss the subject matter at an internal meeting in September 2005.

FOOD and HEALTH

□ ***Hygiene of foodstuffs***

The new Regulation 852/2004 on hygiene of foodstuffs, which was adopted on 29 April 2004, will enter into force no earlier than 1 January 2006.

To facilitate the implementation and interpretation of this Regulation, the European Commission recently issued the following documents:

- Draft guidance document on the implementation of procedures based on the HACCP principles, and on the facilitation of the implementation of the HACCP principles in certain food businesses (SANCO/1955/2005);
- Draft guidance document on the implementation of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs (SANCO 1513/2005); and
- Draft European Commission Regulation on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs (SANCO/4198/2001 Rev.18).

In all these documents, provisions try to ensure flexibility, particularly in relation to small food businesses. However, the European Commission does not provide a definition of small businesses: criteria, such as the number of employees, were deemed to be inappropriate in relation to hygiene matters.

Concerning the nature of the guidance documents, it is important to note that the texts will not have a formal legal status - that is, a binding character. In the event of a dispute, ultimate responsibility for the interpretation of the law will lay with the European Court of Justice.

Furthermore, the European Commission emphasizes that the guidance documents are “*evolving documents*” and therefore open to changes or updates to take account of experiences and information from food business operators and from competent authorities.

In addition to the documents mentioned above, the European Commission also issued in December 2004 “Guidelines on the implementation of the main general food law requirements of Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002 on general food law”, as reported in *Live from Brussels, N° 32*.

HOTREC attended a meeting organised by the DG SANCO of the European Commission in June 2005, where the various documents mentioned above were presented. HOTREC is organising an internal ad hoc meeting in September to discuss them with its member associations.

□ **Food Advisory Group**

The newly created Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health held its first meeting at the beginning of July 2005. The Group consists of representatives of the key stakeholders in the food chain. Its task will be to advise the European Commission on food safety policy.

On that occasion, Mrs. Paola Testori-Coggi, Director at the European Commission’s Directorate General on Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO), gave a complete overview of the state of play of the EU food safety policy and rules, including all latest developments as well as present and future initiatives. Her presentation is available from the HOTREC Secretariat.

HOTREC is among the appointed members of the Food Advisory Group. It appreciates the efforts made by the European Commission to create a forum ensuring greater participation of the key stakeholders in the preparation of food legislation. HOTREC will continue to participate actively in the Group meetings.

□ **Diet Platform**

As reported in *Live from Brussels, N° 32*, the European Commission recently created a “*Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health*”. The platform aims at tackling the problem of obesity and at developing concrete actions. It brings together all relevant players at EU level dealing with health and nutrition issues, such as retailers, food processors, the catering industry, the advertising business, consumer and health NGO’s as well as the medical profession.

So far, two plenary meetings of the Platform have been organised. The Members of the Platform were asked to prepare a “baseline” document (in more simple words, a summary) presenting the relevant activities they carried out in 2004 and have already planned for 2005 with the aim of tackling obesity.

As a member of the Action Platform, HOTREC sent to the European Commission a first version of its baseline document after having consulted its member associations on their respective actions at national, regional or local level. Because eating habits and lifestyles vary to a large extent with geography and cultures, solutions can only be suggested at national level. The baseline document of HOTREC is therefore presented on a national association basis.

HOTREC shares the concerns of the European and national authorities in relation to the issue of nutrition determining citizens’ health to a great extent and welcomes the efforts undertaken by the European Commission in setting up a Platform for action to combat obesity, allowing for a useful exchange of views, experiences and best practices in an open dialogue with a great variety of stakeholders.

However, it is important to note that the personal choice of eating healthy food cannot be regulated at any level. The authorities can only raise awareness, educate and facilitate the dissemination of good practice. In addition, the social and cultural role of restaurants needs to be taken into account; most restaurant customers are not looking merely for a good meal, served at an affordable price, but also for a leisure experience.

COPYRIGHT

□ *New European Commission approach: EU-wide licensing for on-line rights*

For a number of years, the European Commission has considered extending EU copyright legislation, which at present only deals with the substance and enforcement of rights, to the management of rights, i.e. the activities of collecting bodies.

In a working document on 7 July 2005, the European Commission set out a new strategy for improving the management of collecting bodies (European Commission working document), which is a sharp reversal from previous plans. As opposed to the ideas expressed in a 2004 Communication (COM 2004/261), which aimed at achieving good governance of collecting bodies by regulating certain aspects of their activities (e.g. establishment, status, tariff transparency), the European Commission is now opting for a more market-oriented course of action. The basic idea is to give right-holders the possibility of becoming members of a collecting body anywhere in Europe and to authorise it to manage the EU-wide licensing of the use made of their works on-line.

By giving increased freedom of choice to right-holders, the European Commission hopes to bring about a more competitive environment for European collecting bodies. Initially, right-holders’ freedom of choice would only apply to the administration of rights on-line (e.g. music downloads), but the European Commission suggests this would, in the long term, be the most sustainable model for off-line rights as well.

The European Commission has asked stakeholders to comment on the working paper. It is expected to submit a proposal in October 2005. The choice between a legal or a non-binding instrument seems still to be open.

HOTREC intends to submit comments on the working document to the European Commission. A preliminary remark to be made is that the user perspective, which figured in the 2004 Communication, is overshadowed by a rightholder perspective in the working document. Moreover, the working document focuses on on-line use of music. On the commercial user side, the most obvious beneficiaries of the new approach would therefore be on-line distributors of music. Off-line music users – including hotels and restaurants – would have to go on working with their (unreformed) national collecting bodies.

COMPETITION

□ *Anti-competitive practices by Coca-Cola in Europe*

After five years of investigation, the procedure opened by the European Commission in relation to alleged anti-competitive practices by Coca-Cola has been closed by a decision making the following commitments by the firm legally binding:

- No more exclusivity arrangements:
At all times, Coca-Cola customers will remain free to buy and sell carbonated soft drinks (CSDs) from any supplier of their choice;
- No target and growth rebates:
Coca-Cola will no longer offer any rebates that reward its customers purely for purchasing the same amount or more of Coca-Cola's products than in the past. This should make it easier for Coca-Cola's customers to purchase from other CSD suppliers if they so wish;
- No use of Coca-Cola's strongest brands to sell less popular products:
Coca-Cola will not require that a customer that only wants to buy one or more of its best-selling brands (e.g. Coke regular or Fanta Orange) also has to purchase other Coca-Cola products such as its Sprite or its Vanilla Coke; and
- 20% of free space in Coca-Cola's coolers:
Where Coca-Cola provides a free cooler and there is no other chilled beverage capacity in the outlet to which the consumer has a direct access, the outlet operator will be free to use at least 20% of the cooler provided by Coca-Cola for any product of its choosing.

The European Commission could impose a fine amounting to 10% of Coca-Cola's total worldwide turnover if Coca-Cola breaks its commitments.

These commitments by Coca-Cola also concern their sales to hospitality establishments (hotels, restaurants and cafés).

TOURISM

□ *European Tourism Forum 2005*

The European Tourism Forum 2005 will take place from 20-21 October 2005 in La Valletta, Malta. Registration forms for the conference as well as general information on the event are available under www.etfmalta.com.

Discussions will focus on competitiveness, better regulation and sustainability.

Commissioner Verheugen has announced his participation in the Forum, which will be coupled with an informal ministerial meeting.

As in previous years, the event will provide for a good opportunity to meet other stakeholders from the tourism sector as well as representatives of Member States and the European Institutions for an interesting exchange of views.

Mr. Justin Zammit Tabona, MHRA (Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association), will give an introductory presentation during the first day's plenary session. Mr. Bernd Geyer, President of HOTREC, will speak on the issue of "Better regulation through better understanding of the industry" during the first day plenary session, introducing workshop 2 entitled "Better regulation for tourism issues".

Furthermore, Mr. Martin Couchman, BHA (British Hospitality Association) will speak on "Skills for the future" in workshop 1 entitled "Competitiveness and SKILLS / ICT" and Mr. Ákos Niklai, HAH (Hotel Association of Hungary) will report on "The impact of EU regulations: boost or burden for the competitiveness of the hospitality sector in the new Member States" in workshop 2.

□ *European Parliament report on tourism*

On 14 June 2005, the Tourism and Transport Committee (TRAN) of the European Parliament adopted an "own initiative" report (i.e. a report not linked to a legislative procedure) drafted by Mr. Luís Queiró (MEP, EPP, Portugal) on sustainable European tourism.

An important amendment was adopted in relation to VAT. The members of the Committee called on the Council to conclude its decision-making process on the July 2003 proposal for a Directive as regards reduced rates of VAT (COM(2003)397final) so as to enable all Member States to opt for the application of a reduced VAT rate to both hotel accommodation and restaurant services.

The report, the final version of which is unfortunately not yet available on the European Parliament website, apparently also includes calls for European classification and European standards.

The report should be adopted in plenary session at the beginning of September 2005.

HOTREC is very pleased with the successful introduction of the amendments on VAT. However, HOTREC is concerned about the provisions of the report calling for European classification and European standards and will contact the Members of Parliament before the vote in plenary session.

□ ***European Parliament: tourism, key to regional competitiveness***

A new Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the period 2007-2013 is being negotiated. The ERDF funds projects with the aim of reducing regional disparities in the EU. Its three main objectives are 1) to speed up the economic convergence of less-developed regions; 2) to improve regional competitiveness and employment; and 3) to strengthen cross-border cooperation.

The European Commission proposal, issued in 2004, mentioned tourism as a beneficiary of ERDF funds under two of these objectives but not under the one relating to regional competitiveness. The European Parliament “rapporteur”, Mr. Giovanni Claudio Fava (Socialist Group, Italy), added tourism, however, also to the regional competitiveness objective, which was confirmed in the first reading in plenary on 6 July 2005.

The European Commission has not confirmed whether it agrees with the European Parliament’s position as described above. If it takes the amendment on board in its revised proposal, which has yet to be issued, the likelihood of the Council accepting it as well will increase. As the Regulation is to be adopted under the so called co-decision procedure, a joint agreement between Parliament and Council is necessary.

HOTREC supports the European Parliament’s amendment to mention tourism as an activity susceptible for funding under the regional competitiveness objective. HOTREC expressed this view in a letter to the members of the Regional Development Committee from 11 April 2005. Tourism has indeed, as Industry Commissioner Günter Verheugen pointed out in a recent meeting with the tourism industry, a huge potential in Europe. It is appropriate that EU funding helps it achieve this potential in the broadest manner possible.

□ ***European Parliament Tourism Intergroup***

The European Parliament Intergroup for Tourism, held its second public meeting on 22 June 2005 in Brussels. The Intergroup was established at the beginning of this year and consists of a total of 74 members of different nationalities from all the political parties in the European Parliament.

The only item on the agenda was the proposed Directive on an internal market for services and its impact on the European tourism sector. The meeting was chaired by the President of the Intergroup, Mrs. Margie Sudre, MEP. Interventions were made by Mr. Jacques Toubon, MEP, Mrs. Margot Fröhlinger, Head of the services unit at the European Commission’s Directorate General Internal Market and Services (DG MARKT), Mrs. Marguerite Sequaris, CEO of HOTREC and Mr. Michel de Blust, Secretary General of ECTAA.

Participants and speakers discussed the difficulties and fears the different industries within the tourism sector have with the proposal: the different approaches (country of origin, country of destination and mutual recognition principles); the problem of social dumping and consumer protection.

The presentation made on behalf of HOTREC focussed on a less discussed provision of the proposal: Article 31 relating to quality.

For more details on the latest status of the proposed services Directive, see the article above in this newsletter (section Internal Market for Services).

HOTREC welcomed the opportunity to exchange views with representatives of the European Institutions on the proposed services Directive, in particular in relation to standardisation and classification.

□ ***ADS China seminar***

On 20 June 2005, the European Commission organised a seminar on the so-called “Approved Destination Status” agreement between the EU and China (see *Live from Brussels n°30*). Participants included representatives of the EU Member States, China and of the tourism industry.

The meeting’s objective was to provide the European Commission with a first evaluation of the implementation of the EU-China ADS agreement in the Member States one year after its entry into force.

Among the issues discussed was the problem of illegal Chinese overstayers. Some Member States currently consider dropping out of ADS-cooperation due to alleged illegal immigration.

In relation to hotels, participants mentioned the low Chinese demand for high quality accommodation in view of the fact that, in the framework of their multi-country-trips, travellers stay for a very short period of time in one place and do not look for a luxurious place to stay. Moreover, a shortage of qualified staff, i.e. persons with Chinese language skills, is another current difficulty in terms of receiving Chinese visitors, as very few Chinese speak foreign languages.

HOTREC attended the meeting and will follow the further developments with regard to hotels closely.

EU GENERAL

□ ***“Better regulation”***

In March 2005, the European Commission tabled a Communication on “*Better regulation for growth and jobs in the European Union*” (COM(2005)97 final) with the aim to cut red tape, tackle excessive regulation and help to strike the right balance between the costs and

benefits of legislation. The European Commission proposes actions such as a more systematic use of impact assessment and better public consultation on the development of new policy proposals as well as the promotion of the use of alternatives to legislation such as voluntary agreements, self-regulation and European standards. Moreover, the European Commission is also taking measures to simplify existing EU legislation.

The European Commission opened an on-line consultation on 1 June 2005 running until 31 December 2005 inviting businesses and all other interested parties to identify particularly burdensome rules and suggest ways as to how to simplify them best:

<http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/consultations>

The British Presidency, which will last from 1 July 2005 until 31 December 2005, identified the issue of better regulation as an area of priority for its time in office. The issue will also be discussed in October at the European Tourism Forum in Malta (see article under section Tourism).

HOTREC welcomes the initiatives undertaken by the European Commission in view of reducing red tape for businesses, especially SMEs. HOTREC also appreciates the opportunity offered to businesses to express their difficulties with regulation and encourages all its member associations to participate in the consultation.

HOTREC INTERNAL

□ *General Assembly in London*

On 21-23 April 2005, HOTREC held its 51st General Assembly in London coupled with a seminar on the issue of “*The image of the hospitality sector as an employer*”.

The HOTREC business plan for 2005-2007 was presented and discussed during the General Assembly. The business plan reaffirms the commitment of HOTREC to its core activities of monitoring and influencing EU measures on behalf of its members.

An updated version in CD-ROM format of the publication “*250 EU measures affecting the hotel, restaurant & café sector - March 2005*” was distributed among the member associations.

The HOTREC secretariat reported on the latest developments of interest to the hospitality industry at EU level among which the issues of classification, standardisation, better regulation, working time, food hygiene, diet, VAT, copyright, statistics and tourism.

The autumn General Assembly will take place in Vienna on 13-15 October 2005 and will be accompanied by a seminar on the issue of standards.

The full text of the press release is available on the HOTREC website.

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