

PRESS RELEASE

***HOTREC 52nd General Assembly
& seminar “A world of standards”
Vienna, Austria
13-15 October 2005***

AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS MINISTER IN TOURISM DEBATE

Martin Bartenstein, Austrian Federal Minister of Economics and Labour, addressed the 52nd General Assembly of HOTREC – the European association of hotels and restaurants – which took place in Vienna on 13-15 October. The important issues which the Austrian EU Presidency will deal with during the first half of 2006 include the EU Constitution, the internal market for services, the working time Directive, and better regulation. The Austrian EU Presidency will organise a conference in March 2006 on the subject of “*Tourism – key to growth and employment*”.

A seminar on the topic of standards for the hospitality industry and a meeting on hotel classification and quality management were held in connection to the General Assembly.

The HOTREC Secretariat distributed an updated version of the VAT brochure: “*A reduced VAT rate for hospitality and tourism in Europe - An urgent call for the adoption of the July 2003 Commission proposal in relation to VAT rates*”.

The General Assembly reviewed the latest EU developments of interest to the hospitality industry and adopted positions with regard to standards, hotel classification, a quality reference scheme, air ticket tax, and tourism statistics.

Standards

In the seminar “*A world of standards*” representatives from national (AENOR, DIN) and European and international standardisation bodies (CEN, NORMAPME, ISO) presented their activities in the area of services with particular reference to the hospitality industry. A European Commission representative outlined its views on standards for services.

HOTREC fears that, although supposedly voluntary in principle, standards may become de facto mandatory. Standards can easily be integrated into the law. They can also be used as a benchmark by tribunals and the courts, thus making them binding on the industry.

The General Assembly subsequently adopted a position stressing that standards, whenever useful, should be developed only on the industry's initiative and following a process of full transparency and consultation.

Hotel classification

The General Assembly reaffirmed HOTREC's opposition to any attempt by public authorities or standardisation bodies to impose a Europe-wide classification system. In the interests of consumers, however, HOTREC member associations agreed to increase transparency by providing information on the meaning of the national classification systems on their own and HOTREC's websites. The General Assembly also approved a series of recommendations for making national classification systems more streamlined.

Quality reference scheme

The General Assembly agreed on criteria for a HOTREC umbrella quality management scheme, intended for use as a reference model at European level. The intention is not to replace the numerous existing schemes at national/regional level but to create a system for evaluating these. National/regional management programmes which meet the criteria will be recognised as HOTREC quality schemes.

EU tourism policy

The General Assembly was pleased to note the views recently expressed by Commissioner Verheugen in relation to tourism policy. HOTREC agrees with Mr Verhuegen that the tourism industry should not be subjected to more binding rules and standards at the European level. The high growth potential of tourism could otherwise be wasted.

VAT

The General Assembly welcomed the UK Presidency's efforts to relaunch discussions in the Council on the Commission 2003 proposal for extending a reduced VAT rate for restaurants to all Member States.

The HOTREC Secretariat distributed an updated version of the VAT brochure: "*A reduced VAT rate for hospitality and tourism in Europe - An urgent call for the adoption of the July 2003 Commission proposal in relation to VAT rates*".

Air ticket tax

In view of international and European discussions on introducing an air ticket tax to finance an increase in third world development aid, the General Assembly strongly advised Governments against such an initiative. The objective of increasing development aid is laudable in itself but it should be the concern of society as a whole and the burden should not fall on a single industry – tourism. With an air ticket tax the European tourism offer would become less competitive in the world market.

Statistics

HOTREC supports the planned revision of the tourism statistics Directive (1995/57) which needs to be adapted to reflect the changing needs of the industry. The General Assembly agreed on a list of data – including room nights, accommodation revenue, and tourism satellite accounts – which should be added to the Directive. It remains an important task to ensure that burdens on enterprises – which are the primary source of the data – do not become disproportionate.

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Note to editors:

HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café sector at European level. This sector counts 1.4 million businesses and provides 7.5 million jobs in the EU alone. HOTREC brings together 36 National Trade and Employer Associations representing the interest of the sector in 22 different European countries.

List of acronyms used:

AENOR: Asociación Española de Normalización y Certificación

CEN: Comité Européen de Normalisation / European Committee for Standardisation

DIN: Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V.

ISO: International Organisation for Standardisation

NORMAPME: European Office of Crafts, Trades, and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises for Standardisation