

***HOTREC 51st General Assembly
& seminar “The image of the hospitality sector as an employer”
London, United Kingdom
21-23 April 2005***

PRESS RELEASE

HOTREC, the association representing hotels, restaurants and cafés in Europe, held its 51st General Assembly on 22-23 April in London. The General Assembly was preceded, on 21 April, by a seminar on 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 hospitality sector” was distributed among the member associations.

The HOTREC secretariat reported on the latest developments of interest to the hospitality industry at EU level.

Classification

In relation to hotel classification, HOTREC has created a classification and quality task force which meets regularly to discuss increased transparency and benchmarking of national classification systems. HOTREC believes strongly in self-regulation as a way forward on this issue, and opposes any attempt to impose external rules on the industry.

Services Directive

HOTREC welcomes the Commission proposal as it aims to facilitate administrative procedures for hoteliers and restaurateurs wishing to provide services or to establish a business in another Member State. The achievement of a true internal market for services should contribute to the economic growth of the hospitality sector. HOTREC, however, expresses reservations about the call in Article 31 of the proposed Directive for the development of standards by the standardisation bodies.

Standardisation

HOTREC is worried about the activity of standardisation bodies, which are increasingly focusing their efforts on the service sector. Very close attention needs to be paid to the development of standards because, although supposedly “voluntary” at the outset, standards may be integrated into law and used as benchmarks by tribunals and the Courts, thus making them effectively binding on the industry.

The need for standardisation in this area is not obvious as services differ in important respects from goods. Initiatives for standards should come from the industry and be based on commercial considerations and on a proper business impact assessment. Presently, the standardisation bodies are not “*up to standards*” in terms of openness and consultation with industry, which means standards tend to be introduced via the “*back door*”.

HOTREC will address the issue of the development of standards at national, European, and international level in a forthcoming seminar in October 2005.

Better regulation

Proper impact assessments are also needed in relation to the development of legislative instruments of relevance to the sector. Such assessments have been promised for several years by the Commission but little of the sort has been seen so far.

HOTREC hopes the commitment of Commissioner Verheugen to reduce red tape, given in a meeting in February with representatives of the main European associations of the tourism sector, will result in a more business friendly environment.

Working time Directive

HOTREC is watching very carefully the amendments recently discussed in the European Parliament to the Commission proposal for an amended working time Directive.

It is essential that the new working time Directive guarantees flexibility and does not impose red tape and additional paperwork on businesses. The right for individual workers to work more than 48 hours a week on average under the Directive should be maintained.

Hygiene of foodstuffs

HOTREC welcomes the work currently undertaken by the Commission to facilitate the application of HACCP-principles (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) in small businesses, which are referred to in the April 2004 Regulation on the hygiene of foodstuffs. This Regulation will apply on 1 January 2006 at the earliest. Hopefully, by then, the Commission will have agreed specific arrangements offering sufficient flexibility for very small restaurants.

Diet, physical activity, and health

At national as well as European and international level, diet, physical activity, and health are increasingly being discussed. The Commission recently launched a European platform for action on these issues. The platform participants, among which HOTREC, are invited to step up their activities in order to tackle the problem of obesity.

VAT

HOTREC welcomes the intention of the UK Presidency, which will begin on 1 July 2005, to start work on the simplification of the VAT regime. It would particularly wish the Council under the UK Presidency to address the July 2003 Commission proposal to extend the option of introducing reduced VAT rates for restaurants to all Member States.

Management of copyright and neighbouring rights

HOTREC welcomes the commitment in the Commission work programme for 2005 to submit a proposal on the management of copyright and neighbouring rights in October. Good governance in collecting societies across Europe is urgently needed with respect to levels and transparency of

tariffs. At the same time users must have easier access to arbitration if they wish to challenge the tariffs.

Statistics

In relation to the review of the tourism statistics Directive, HOTREC stresses the importance of accurate, relevant, and up-to-date statistics to the European hospitality sector. At the same time it is necessary to ensure that burdens on enterprises – which are the primary source of the data – do not become disproportionate.

Tourism – Queiró report

HOTREC welcomes the draft report by Mr. Queiró, which accurately acknowledges the importance of the tourism industry and the fact that tourism is affected by many policies which come under the Community's remit. HOTREC appreciates in particular the call for specific references to tourism in the new structural policy instruments as well as the call for better coordination within the Commission in relation to developments affecting tourism (a demand we have been expressing regularly over the last 10 years).

HOTREC welcomes the relaunch of the European Parliament tourism Intergroup which should allow for exchange of views and productive co-operation among the representatives of the European Institutions – especially of the European Parliament - and the tourism sector.

Seminar on image of the sector as an employer

Martin Couchman, Deputy Chief Executive of the BHA, chaired the seminar in which representatives from hospitality associations in Italy, Czech Republic, Austria, and France presented the efforts they have undertaken to recruit and retain workers.

Across Europe the hospitality industry is facing the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified workers. Most HOTREC associations are carrying out campaigns in order to promote the attractiveness of employment in the sector.

The attractiveness of the sector does not depend exclusively on the pay level. Human resources management, training opportunities and career prospects are key areas for improvement. The achievement of professionalism should be sought for all jobs in the sector.

In line with the seminar discussions, HOTREC will take an active part in the “2006 – *European year of mobility for workers*” initiative launched by the Commission.

In September 2005, HOTREC and EFFAT, its trade union social partner, are organising a meeting to discuss the additional opportunities e-learning could provide for both managers and employees in all businesses, including SMEs.

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