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# **Accessible Tourism in Europe**

**Conference on the occasion of the European Day of  
Persons with Disabilities and European Tourism Day**

**Brussels, 3–4 December 2013**

***Report***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accessible tourism is a right. People with disabilities are entitled to travel and relax in the best possible conditions, as are families with young children, senior citizens and other people with special needs.

Accessible tourism brings growth and jobs. Investing in it can open up a market of some 140 million people across Europe, including an estimated 80 million Europeans with disabilities.

Both aspects were examined in detail at a two-day EU conference on accessible tourism in Europe. As part of a drive to mainstream disability issues in European policy-making, the December 2013 event marked two special dates. 3 December is the International and **European Day of Persons with Disabilities**. The second day of the conference was under the auspices of **European Tourism Day**, which is celebrated each year on 27 September.

The conference brought together disabled people's organisations, companies and people with and without disabilities who are the users of tourism products and services. Also taking part were national public administrations and regions which have responsibilities for accessibility matters, together with representatives of the European Commission.

The following were among the main points to come out of the conference sessions:

Accessible tourism benefits everybody. So does Design for All. An inclusive approach leads to innovation. Devices originally developed for people with disabilities are often adopted by society as a whole. TV remote controls are a case in point. In hotels, rooms designed with accessibility in mind are also favoured by other guests, such as senior citizens or family groups with young children. And an app for travellers with cognitive problems has also been found useful for children travelling on their own.

Accessible tourism is a very big market. And, as the population ages, it will get even bigger. By 2020, on some estimates, 25 % of travel and leisure spending will come from people who have some form of disability. There is also a multiplier effect here: people who are elderly or who have a disability often take other people along when they are travelling.

Accessible tourism helps to reduce seasonality. People with disabilities and older people are more willing and able to travel for leisure out of season. This off-peak business is a boon for the tourism industry.

People with disabilities themselves must be involved in decision-making on accessibility. They are the ones who know best what is needed. They and their organisations have to be consulted at every stage: 'Nothing for the user without the user'.

Staff training is vital to the promotion of truly accessible tourism.

Information and communication need to be improved. People with disabilities must receive fully reliable information about accessibility before booking travel and accommodation.

We all have special needs. Every person, with or without a disability, has individual requirements. The tourism industry must be geared up to cope with this individuality.



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ICT has a major part to play in barrier-free tourism.

Cooperation between the public and private sectors must be at the heart of accessible tourism.

Europe is the world's favourite tourist destination, but competition is fierce and Europe cannot rest on its laurels. It has to be known for high-quality tourism services. Accessible tourism is an important part of that offer.

For the European Commission, two Directorates-General jointly organised the conference. Tackling discrimination and strengthening equality are missions assigned to DG Justice, while promoting European tourism is within the remit of DG Enterprise and Industry. Every year, the European Day of Persons with Disabilities is organised in cooperation with the European Disability Forum. This independent platform represents, and is run by, people with disabilities throughout Europe.

## ***Day 1. Let's Go Accessible: in Tourism, in City Life***

### ***Opening speeches***

Tourism has been one of the more resilient sectors during the economic crisis, **Antti Peltomäki** pointed out. He is the Deputy Director-General of **DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission**. The tourism sector employs some 17 million people in the EU and accounts for about 10 % of its GDP, so it is an important driver for growth. The EU is the world's No. 1 tourist destination, and Europeans have every interest in keeping it that way. But people with special needs often face a lack of information about accessibility, so this must be remedied. Accessible tourism leads to responsible, sustainable development. As the world's most rapidly ageing continent, Europe will see an increase in the proportion of tourists with special needs. Moreover, an elderly person or a person with a disability often travels with one or more accompanying people. That multiplier effect must also be taken into account when investing in accessibility. But it still has to be mainstreamed into business models if tourism enterprises are to realise its full potential. Accessible tourism leads to innovation and so to competitive advantages. Examples in Europe include GPS-based technology that guides blind tourists, Bluetooth-powered cyberpasses that help people with disabilities to move around cities and more efficient website applications. New skills training and job profiles are now oriented towards catering for tourists with special needs. More than 90 historic sites across the EU have been made accessible. Progress so far has been encouraging, but there is still a lot of work to be done. This is where the EU can bring added value and make change happen. In its preparatory action, *Tourism Accessibility for All*, the Commission is assessing where the priorities lie and gathering the relevant data. Its new programme for SMEs over the next seven-year period includes a commitment to continue enhancing quality, sustainability, accessibility and skills in tourism.

Accessible tourism is a key human right, said **Donata Vivanti**, Vice-President of the **European Disability Forum**. It is important to people with disabilities, but also to their families and others around them. Freedom of movement is one of the main elements of European citizenship, but it implies the availability of accessible transport. People with disabilities are entitled to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities makes that clear. Accessibility is not only physical. It is also about accessible communication and information, as well as welcoming people with different behaviours into integrated settings. If accessibility is built in at the outset, using universal design principles, it is not more costly. As the European demographic is changing, the need for accessibility will become even more pronounced in future. Better training of tourism industry staff is one way of meeting that challenge. The EU has an important part to play in achieving this. We need strong legislation, but we also need to change our way of thinking. Accessible tourism will mean more clients for the tourism sector.

The rights of people with disabilities are being mainstreamed into the various policies promoted by the EU, **Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea**, Director for Equality in **DG Justice**, emphasised. Many areas of accessibility, such as transport, the built environment and ICT are relevant to tourist services, he pointed out. People with disabilities must have equal access to hotels, restaurants, planes, trains, buses, taxis, cultural institutions such as museums and theatres and all other facilities and services offered to the public when travelling or on holiday. In the three years since the adoption of the EU Disability Strategy 2010–20, good progress has been made. DG Justice has been discussing with stakeholders an important initiative on the accessibility of goods and services across the EU's single market. Now, at the end of 2013, the bulk of the work has been done and the Commission will soon table this initiative. It is designed to be both business-friendly and helpful for the consumers of accessible goods and services. In 2012, the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive on improving the accessibility of the websites of public sector bodies and public

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authorities. In the meantime, this has progressed in the European Parliament, which has issued an opinion that considerably strengthens the proposal's scope and application. Web accessibility is very relevant to tourism. Everyone must be able to book flights, make restaurant reservations, etc. online. Preparatory work is well under way on a voluntary initiative for EU countries' mutual recognition of each other's disability cards, reductions and entitlements. The need for such a scheme is highlighted in the Commission's *EU Citizenship Report 2013*. By December 2013, fifteen Member States had shown interest in joining the Project Working Group set up to sort out the practical problems that still need to be solved before a common card can be launched in the participating countries. The Commission is also working closely together with the European Disability Forum on this project. He hopes that more Member States will join the project, so that eventually the '*inclEUusive card*' can be used all over the EU.

### ***Session 1. Information and mobility. Planning the trip.***

**Dovilė Juodkaitė**, President of the **Lithuanian National Forum of the Disabled**, chaired this session.

The EU's new information campaign on passenger rights was presented by **Meglėna Kuneva**, Special Adviser on passenger rights to **European Commission** Vice-President Siim Kallas. Specific rights for people with disabilities or reduced mobility are a key point in current EU regulations for all modes of transport, she said. They cover such aspects as journey information, reservations, fares, damaged luggage, accidents, delays, cancellations and boarding denial. EU passenger rights regulations in general are complemented by other EU legislation. However, if we are not aware of our rights, legislation achieves only half of its purpose. So in June 2013, the Commission launched its second EU-wide information campaign on passenger rights. In a 2011 paper, the Commission set out the 10 rights that passengers must enjoy on modes of transport. The legislation specifies that passengers must not be refused booking or boarding owing to their disability, unless for justified safety reasons established by law or by a competent authority. Rail station operators need to have non-discriminatory access conditions in place and make them publicly known, including on their website if they provide other travel information by this means. Other information on conditions of carriage, journey conditions and access conditions is to be made available in appropriate and accessible formats. The obligation to provide assistance to passengers cannot be limited or waived. Assistance must be provided for free. It is of crucial importance that any need for assistance is notified to carriers, their agents, ticket-sellers or tour operators — at least 48 hours before departure for rail, sea or air or 36 hours for coach transport. The managing body of the infrastructure needs to designate points of arrival and departure for assistance. The Commission also committed itself to monitor non-discrimination in transport and provide guidelines for the application of these regulations to air travel. Those guidelines were already in place by June 2012, in time for the London Paralympics, and were welcomed by the European Disability Forum.

After 30 years in a wheelchair, **Damien Birambeau** is convinced that his disability was never the problem. The problem was the lack of accessibility. He is the President of the French organisation **Jaccede**, which he founded in 2006. It aims to foster universal accessibility and enable people with reduced mobility to play a full part in urban life. His long experience convinced him of the need for very detailed information on the conditions of accessibility to public places. A study confirmed that view: many people with disabilities avoid travelling simply because they lack the necessary information. That is why he launched Jaccede. It operates through a website, [www.jaccede.com](http://www.jaccede.com), and a smartphone app, Jaccede Mobile. These provide very detailed information about the degree of accessibility of a given place. Then it is up to each person to decide whether the place meets their needs. In the meantime, other general information sites have started linking to Jaccede's accessibility data. Jaccede is a collaborative guide. Anyone can contribute information. So this is citizen power for mobility. Today, some 30 000 places are referenced on Jaccede and there are English- and French-language versions of the site. His dream for the future is both to increase the bulk of the data and to redistribute that information. It would be automatically posted on other sites, such as those of travel agencies, hotel bookers, the railways and so on. Accessibility



information would become part of their service, rather than being on a special site for people with disabilities. The community of the 'Jaccedeurs', the information providers, could also be greatly expanded, but this would require the development of moderating tools. Two initiatives are currently underway to put this kind of accessibility information online at the European level, and Jaccede could also link across to these. The more we link up across Europe, the more likely we are to convince the big online platforms to include accessibility information.

The innovative EureWelcome accessibility label was described by **Danielle Breyer**, from the **Ministry of the Middle Classes, Tourism and Housing, Luxembourg**. A EureWelcome plaque at the entrance to a location shows that it has been inspected for accessibility, that accessibility information is available and that the information is true and reliable. It indicates that everyone is welcome in that establishment, including people with disabilities, and that special efforts are made to ensure their greatest possible autonomy during their stay. The EureWelcome label is now used and recognised throughout the 'Interreg' formed by Luxembourg and the neighbouring countries Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Establishments that have gained the label are listed in tourist brochures and on websites ([www.eurewelcome.org](http://www.eurewelcome.org), as well as [www.welcome.lu](http://www.welcome.lu) in Luxembourg). In recent years, the emphasis has been on mainstreaming the label into general tourism promotion drives. She pointed out that, unlike 'traditional' labels aimed at people with reduced mobility, EureWelcome is holistic. By focusing on the quality of services, it encourages providers to go the extra mile for *all* their guests.

Hotels should not think in terms of disabilities, said **Magnus Berglund**, **Scandic Hotels Accessibility Ambassador**. Rather, they should look at what each guest wants. All hotel clients should feel that they are guests. This is often about attention to small, practical details. For instance, the doors of many toilets for people with disabilities cannot actually be closed by people in wheelchairs. It is also about training team members in a hotel — for example, to serve coffee on tables that can be reached by people in wheelchairs. Scandic has just launched a new online training programme about accessible hotel service, at <http://www.scandichotels.com/e-learning/accessibility/story.html>. This includes interactive features that prompt thinking about individual needs. The restaurant, for example, may ensure that meals for a blind guest are laid out in a clock pattern on the plate — the meat at 'one o'clock' and so on. On accessible design and construction, Scandic has developed its own standard, which it includes in contracts with builders and other suppliers. Provisions range from walking stick holders at reception desks to a commitment that 10 % of the rooms in newly built hotels will be equipped for people with disabilities. These are often also the rooms most requested by people who do not have disabilities. For example, beds of adjustable height are also very useful for guests with children. Design for All is good for everyone. TV remote controls were originally developed for people with disabilities. For each of its hotels, Scandic provides 80 points of information that will be of interest to people with certain disabilities — for instance, the height of the reception desk. One problem for hotels is that only about 28 % of disabilities are visible. They often need to be told that somebody has particular requirements. And yet over one billion people worldwide have some kind of disability. That is a very big market. US figures predict that, by 2020, some 25 % of travel and leisure spending will come from people with disabilities.

There is no such thing as an average user, **Susanna Laurin** insisted. She is the CEO of **Funka Nu**, a Swedish-based consultancy on accessibility in IT and the built environment. E-accessibility can help people to fulfil civic responsibilities, she said, but it also has to be about the fun things in life — including tourism. For instance, a team of Funka Nu staffers recently won a hackathon competition with an app for accessible travel. They have now secured funding to develop the prototype into a commercial product. Among other things, the app can give reminders that a planned departure time is approaching (say, in 15 minutes). These prompts can be visual or auditory, depending on the user's needs. A customisable checklist is also available before leaving home: *do I have my wallet, my ticket, my keys...?* Once travel has begun, the app uses the journey information transmitted by Swedish public transport vehicles to keep the user informed — for instance, it can signal the need to get off at the next stop and change to another bus.

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Linked to the GPS system, the app will also alert a user who appears to be heading in the wrong direction. The user can then choose: *I know what I'm doing*, *Plot a new course* or *Call a friend and ask for help*. Tests have shown this app to be useful for adults with cognitive problems, but also for children travelling alone. She described a project by Swedish bikers to build a retirement community in Thailand that includes fully accessible accommodation. Funka Nu provided advice for this, and one result has been the transfer of assistive technology to Thailand. Funka Nu has tested many accessibility guides. These do have solid advantages, she said — not least the ability to plan ahead. But they lack internationally recognised symbols and ratings. She suggested that an EU-wide standard is needed for the measurement and presentation of accessibility.

**Jamie Bolling**, Director of the **European Network on Independent Living**, commented that airlines are economising on staff and other factors. So will there be an increased tendency to turn away passengers with disabilities on alleged safety grounds? Or will we see an end to these exceptions? **Florian Van der Bellen**, from **Kaunertal Tourismus, Austria**, pointed out that wheelchair designs vary from country to country. This raises problems for accessibility standards. For instance, a Norwegian who visits a hotel where the bathrooms are 'accessible' under the Austrian standard may in fact find that his/her wheelchair is too wide for the bathroom door. Are there any plans for a European accessibility standard, which could provide more reliable information for cross-border travellers? **Wolfgang Angermann**, President of the **European Blind Union**, felt that airline staff are often poorly trained for receiving people with disabilities. For example, a blind passenger may be obliged to use a wheelchair in an airport as the staff do not know how to guide a blind person. So staff training is very important. **Mari Silsalu**, from the **European Network on Independent Living**, said the right to take risks and make mistakes is as important to young people with disabilities as it is to all young people. Staff training in schools and other places catering for young people should emphasise the need to give young people responsibility, so that they do have the opportunity to make mistakes. **Lidia Best**, representing the **European Federation of Hard of Hearing People**, asked how Scandic Hotels deals with differing legislation across the countries in which they operate. She suggested that hotels might subtitle TV programmes, for the benefit of hard of hearing guests. **Pirkko Anneli Mahlamäki**, Secretary General of the **Finnish Disability Forum**, agreed that there is no longer any such thing as an average user. She asked how that point can be put across more effectively. **Meglana Kuneva** said the EU approach so far has been one of minimum harmonisation of legislation on accessibility. So yes, the reality is that standards do vary from one country to another. She would welcome harmonisation, but to reach a consensus among the Member States, national organisations of people with disabilities would need to press their governments on this. And even if common legislation were achieved, there are major differences in national enforcement structures and cultures. So networking of these enforcement agencies is important. She agreed that staff training is vital, and she suggested that businesses should bring in the organisations familiar with the subject when they are designing support of this kind. **Damien Birambeau** thought that precise information can help to overcome the issue of differing national standards. For instance, if the exact width of a step or opening radius of a door is part of the information available, a knowledge of the national standard concerned is not really necessary. The Jaccede approach has been to provide users with as much precise information as possible and then leave it up to their own judgement. **Magnus Berglund** pointed out that Scandic has its own accessibility standard. 95 % of the time, that standard is higher than the legal one. However, if any country's legislation sets a higher standard, Scandic does of course comply with it. As regards awareness-raising, **Susanna Laurin** stressed the need to analyse the language used when talking about people with disabilities. We have to get away from a 'them and us' attitude. One problem is that many people with disabilities hesitate to complain when something is not as it should be. That has to change. Openness is the only way to overcome these problems. On risk-taking, she described a so far unimplemented idea for lottery tickets in Braille and a Swedish scheme to give visually impaired young people a chance to drive a car. This is done in the forest on a gravel road, so that they can hear the road surface while they drive.

**Address by the Greek Minister of Health**

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‘There is a total benefit from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of life, and this is a matter of concern to all of us.’ That was the message from **Spyridon-Adonis Georgiadis, the Greek Minister of Health**, in his speech at the conference. His address anticipated the start, on 1 January 2014, of the Greek Presidency of the EU Council. Greek policy-making on disability has been conducted in close consultation with the disability movement, the minister emphasised. After all, people with disabilities themselves are ‘the ones who know better than anyone what needs to be changed and improved’. Despite the economic circumstances, he stressed that Greece will always ensure that people with disabilities receive their full rights and the services that they deserve. However, the Greek Government believes that there should be a qualitative evaluation of projects, structures and services. People with disabilities receive priority in Greece’s public healthcare. Current legislation provides for rehabilitation centres and ‘the private business sector has developed remarkable centres all over the country’. Greece’s *Tourism for All* programme enables people with disabilities to visit parts of the country at discount rates. An online application on accessibility of tourist sites and general leisure activities located in Greece has been created for persons with disabilities. Both the private tourism industry and Greek local and regional authorities have understood the economic importance of accessible tourism and have been acting to strengthen it. The Laboratory of Technical Engineering of the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautics of the **University of Patras** has pioneered a device, called [Seatrac](#), to make seaside bathing accessible. The European Disability Strategy 2010–20 has set clear priorities, while ‘the funds secured from the EU constitute a serious funding source for a series of policies that will improve the everyday life of persons with disabilities and their equal participation in all aspects of social activity and life’. He announced a new Greek government initiative on medical tourism. A clear institutional framework has now been set for this, aimed at ‘offering a safe and qualitative provision of services to the international visitor and patient’. Among other things, ‘we have institutionalised the compulsory insuring of the medical staff and units, for the case of civil liability, as well as the obligatory certification of health care providers by international organisations for the certification of medical destination services’. The goal is to ‘combine leisure travel with the provision of medical health care’.

### ***Session 2. Local areas and services in challenging areas. Enjoying the local area.***

Chairing this session was **Johan ten Geuzendam, DG Justice**, Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Moves to make Europe’s historical heritage more accessible were cited by **Maria Orejas-Chantelot**. She is the Director of Thematic Networks at the **European Foundation Centre**, which groups over 300 foundations operating in Europe. One network is the League of Historical and Accessible Cities. This acts as a hub for the exchange of good practices and know-how. For instance, a consortium of four foundations pulled together 3 million euros’ worth of funding and asked cities in Denmark to apply. The city of Viborg won and launched a contest of its own for plans to make the city’s historical centre more accessible to everyone. The two finalists took completely different approaches to historical heritage interventions. One project emphasised discretion. So if a structure needed to be incorporated into a medieval church, the addition would be built in wood and made as unobtrusive as possible. The other took the line that any present-day intervention should leave an imprint of our own times — and that imprint is accessibility. For example, an accessibility ramp in the middle of a church would be modern, red-coloured and highly visible. These contrasting views have sparked a broader philosophical discussion about the best way to make historical sites fully accessible. This is not so much a question of money as of political commitment. A project in Lucca, Italy, started out with almost no funds. The foundation’s president went round knocking on the doors of all the local stakeholders and associations to get them involved. She then spent a year and a half putting together a project that they could all agree on. The result is a scheme that takes full account of local people’s accessibility needs as well as the requirements of tourism. The European Foundation Centre has produced a guide describing the approaches taken by

various cities. This includes checklists that other cities and foundations can use to create accessible itineraries in historical centres.

Mobile technologies can promote independent travel, **Enrique Varela** insisted. He is the President of the Spanish-based **Fundación Tecnología Social (F\_T\_S)**, which has implemented many European projects on tourism, accessibility and ICT. And he brought along some technology for his own presentation. As his sight is impaired, he was listening to a computerised voiceover of his slide texts as he went along. The F\_T\_S thinks more in terms of diversity than of disability, he said. The ICT toolbox is not so much about Design for All. Rather, it enables Design for Each and Everyone. Technology can be customised. It can be adapted to our diversity. *Satellite's Way*, a project launched in 2010, was built around the Way of St James pilgrimage made from various parts of Europe to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. It crosses many cultural sites in Spain and includes elements of tourism, hiking, horse-riding and cycling. So the project used it as a scenario to test just how compatible technology is with culture and independence. Communications systems, Twitter and apps were all brought into play to make the journey easier and more interesting for the participants. Geolocated audio guides were provided for places of interest along the way. Official guides and databases were used in realtime. One aim was to share knowledge and experience. Younger pilgrims taught older ones to use devices such as iPhones and digital compasses. The 738 km French route was covered in 32 stages, and there were workshops on ICT use. 30 pilgrims were helped by a 15-person support team. At each stop, a mobile exhibition showed the local community what the project was doing. He also presented [Cultways](#), a project designed to show the potential for mobile technologies in the tourism sector. It aims to make these techniques scalable and adaptable to all parts of Europe, and to spread the word about them. In particular, it addresses the challenges of preserving and exploiting cultural heritage and tackles the environmental and safety issues raised by travel in remote areas. F\_T\_S ensured that every part of this project is accessible and usable by people with particular needs. Various applications tested through the project are likely to be continued and commercialised. A goal is to create a consortium of communities along European cultural routes that are interested in developing social technology.

*Seatrac* is a Greek-invented device that gives people with disabilities completely autonomous access to the sea. It features a solar-powered chair on a tracked runway extending from the beach down into the water. Behind the project is a team headed by **Vassilis Kostopoulos**, Professor of Applied Mechanics & Composite Structures at the **University of Patras**. He explained that the project was launched with backing from the former prefecture of Achaia. The engineers set out to design a non-permanent structure. Another requirement was that it could be operated independently by the users. And it had to be completely safe. All the relevant European safety standards were incorporated into the design right from the start. People have been using the device for four years now, and to date there have been no accidents. Durability was a further consideration — it had to withstand exposure to strong sunlight and salt water. Users' experiences and suggestions have been taken fully into account in the latest model. One refinement in the current version is a camera-controlled system to halt the device if there are any obstructions. Twenty *Seatrac* devices have already been installed (up to December 2013) in various parts of Greece and another three in Cyprus. A typical system on a popular beach will have some 200 users per season. As well as the users themselves, *Seatrac* has benefited the local economy of Achaia, where it is manufactured, and the university, which has been able to reinvest in research. A spin-off company has now been founded by the two other researchers on the team, **George Sotiriadis** and **Ignatios Fotiou**.

Accessibility is quite a challenge for amusement parks and attractions, **Andreas Andersen** said. He is the CEO and President of the Swedish-based **Liseberg Group**, one of the largest amusement park operators in Europe, and was formerly the Executive Director of **IAAPA Europe**, the European branch of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions. The parks 'have to build for the many, not for the few,' he pointed out, and 'accessibility often has to be balanced with safety. Unfortunately we have seen, over the last 10 years, serious and high-profile accidents, which have included riders with



disabilities.’ Amusement parks and attractions could adopt **a six-step model for improving accessibility**, he suggested:

- 1. Map** the situation as it is. What is accessible, and what isn’t? This mapping is a complex task in an amusement park. And it has to be multidimensional, taking account of all types of disability.
- 2. Communicate** the results of the mapping exercise, so that people know what is accessible and what is not. Communication can be via specialised database systems, such as the Danish Accessibility Labelling Scheme ([www.godadgang.dk](http://www.godadgang.dk)) or the Swedish Accessibility Database (<http://epi.vgregion.se/sv/TD>). It can also be through the facility’s own website, or through special printed or digital guides.
- 3. Facilitate.** Education, information and training of staff are extremely important for improving accessibility. Often, special staff may be trained to guide the guest through the visit. Parks may also offer free entry for a companion of a guest with disabilities, as well as access without queuing and re-rides. At Liseberg, some 12 000 visitors a year are free accompanying persons — about 1 % of all guests. Many parks also offer special days for children with disabilities, for example children with psychiatric disorders or social anxiety, so avoiding their having to visit crowded parks and stand in line. But there has been some rethinking on this. Up to 2004, Denmark’s Tivoli park had a special day for visitors with disabilities. However, this was discontinued because the park wanted to concentrate its efforts on making every day accessible, not just one per year.
- 4. Plan.** Create a detailed overview of which physical amendments are necessary to improve disabled access. This plan should be integrated into investment and facility maintenance planning.
- 5. Prioritise.** Many parks and attractions are old. This often complicates and delays contemporary accessibility solutions. Improved accessibility also has to be balanced against aesthetics. And most attractions have tight financial constraints. Amusement parks are commercial operations, so investments need to pay off.
- 6. Change.** Think accessibility when building or changing rides and facilities. Disney are ‘the absolute world leaders when it comes to creating highly accessible environments in their parks,’ he said. Next year, Liseberg is planning to build a funicular to the highest point of its park. This €2 million investment will improve access not only for guests with movement impairments, but also for all guests.

One way of building an accessibility culture is to ensure non-discrimination in staffing. So **Frédéric Roussel** began his presentation by hailing the 602 employees with disabilities at **Disneyland Paris**. He is the complex’s Senior Manager for Parks Product Development and Visitor Accessibility. The number of employees there with disabilities has risen by 58 % since 2007, he said. 99 % of them are on permanent contracts. Disneyland Paris has a three-person team dedicated to ‘distributing a little magic to the 60 000 visitors with disabilities each year who have particular needs’. While the accessibility of buildings is clearly regulated in France, there is no legal framework for the accessibility of attractions. So Disney works together with associations, the authorities and the local emergency services to devise appropriate procedures for each attraction. Staff training and awareness-building are key to catering for special requirements, he said. External communication is equally important. Guests with special requirements need information ‘upstream’ — before their visit. The Disneyland Paris site provides accessibility information in eight languages, notably boarding details for each attraction. The online chat facility for reservations is available in special versions for deaf people and the hard of hearing. Work has been done with associations in France and the UK to identify which attractions are suitable for people with mental disabilities. Special tickets allow entry for up to four assisting persons per guest with disabilities. Where possible, Disney modifies its attractions so that transfer boards can be used for people in wheelchairs. Some attractions can actually be boarded in a wheelchair. Hearing loops are being installed in some restaurants, theatres and shops. Oversize seats for corpulent people are being introduced in some attractions. The onsite hotels have more than 100 rooms with special adaptations, and 12 accessible bungalows have been added. On firms’ purchase of accessibility equipment, he sounded a note of warning: the word ‘accessible’ has become a selling point, so before buying, it is important to check — for instance, with the appropriate associations — that the items really are ‘accessible’.



**Rita Costa Vilhena**, Head of Division for Research and Development at the **National Institute for Rehabilitation, Portugal**, recalled that a Portuguese beach accessibility project began in 2005 at 50 beaches. Today, there are 180 accessible beaches. Nearly half of them offer bathing facilities for people with mobility impairment, such as amphibious chairs. She expressed interest in Seatrac and asked for more details. **Vassilis Kostopoulos** commented that the financing of Seatrac by a number of Greek regions is a positive sign. Local authorities see this as a contribution to the well-being of their citizens. The main difference between Seatrac and other current bathing accessibility systems is that it can be operated autonomously by the user. Each user can obtain a remote control device from the local authority or other providers near the beach. As a paraplegic, **Gerasimos Fessian, Independent Regional Adviser, Greece**, believes that Seatrac can 'set people free'. It is also a real boost for tourist destinations. But there have been constant bureaucratic obstacles in Greece, and these have to be overcome in cooperation with the EU.

**Rose-Marie Broeders** from **Enter**, the Flemish Expert Centre on Accessibility, wondered what is being done to ensure that all amusement parks adopt the way of working outlined by Andreas Andersen. She said there have been problems in Flanders with attractions from which people with disabilities are barred. **Andreas Andersen** thought that the Flemish case had been about safety measures determined not by the park but by the certifying agency. The balance between safety and accessibility is a very complicated issue. Technological development is one way of tackling this problem — better safety harnesses and easier access to certain attractions. The IAAPA focuses mainly on technology, education and the sharing of best practices. **Pirkko Anneli Mahlamäki** asked if the long-standing and well-regarded US accessibility legislation has been an inspiration for the accessibility work at Disneyland Paris. **Frédéric Roussel** replied that, while Disneyland Paris obviously applies French and European regulations, its design was very much influenced by what happens in the United States. For that reason, various accessibility features were already in place before the French legislation of 2005.

**John Patrick Clarke, European Disability Forum**, reported that members of the European Down Syndrome Association have produced easy-to-read tourist guides to Dublin, Lisbon and Rome. Intellectual disabilities should not be overlooked when developing accessible tourism, he stressed. **David Banes** asked what amusement parks and attractions could and should be doing to accommodate people with autism. Autistic people tend to be last in the queue for technological assistance, thought **Enrique Varela**. He has a son who is both autistic and blind. F\_T\_S has been developing pictograms that can help autistic people to participate. In 2010, his son took part in half of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. He was 10 years old at the time. **Andreas Andersen** explained that his park closes for one day each year in order to invite children with autism and other mental disabilities for visits in small groups. Entrance on that day is limited to 1 500 people, thus creating a safe, less stressful environment for these children. But for parks that are open every day of the year, this is not an option. So they need to concentrate on making certain parts of the visit as stress-free as possible — for example, by ensuring that autistic children do not have to queue. **Donata Vivanti** said her two autistic children had been 'affectionate clients of Euro Disney since the beginning in 2002'. It was all very well organised, and she had not been aware of any particular accessibility issues. But there are certainly some measures that can facilitate access by autistic children, such as labels to avoid queuing. Some larger, uncrowded spaces can also help to avoid excessive stimulation. Staff training is important. In the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, short training courses for beach staff were organised in Rimini, leading to the award of 'autism-friendly' labels for beach establishments.

**Johan ten Geuzendam** asked the panel members, regarding their development of initiatives, how beneficial it is to work with organisations of people who have disabilities themselves. They all agreed that close cooperation with people with disabilities and their associations is vital — 'nothing for the user without the user'.

**Philippe Miet** is from the **CFHE**, a French organisation providing a link between France and Europe on disability policies. He asked if the IAAPA works systematically with attraction designers to ensure that



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future attractions are accessible. And would it be useful to have universally applicable standards? **Frédéric Roussel** confirmed that Disney does work with the attraction manufacturers on this. Standards would certainly be of help here, as accessible attractions would then become stock catalogue items rather than special orders from park operators. **Andreas Andersen** pointed to the existing European standard on amusement ride safety, EN 13814. This is a very dynamic standard, he said, and he hoped it can be further developed to fully cover accessibility issues.

#### **Access City Award**

At a ceremony just after the 3 December conference session, the European Commission announced that Gothenburg is the winner of the Access City Award 2014. This European prize recognises Gothenburg's outstanding work on increasing accessibility for disabled people and the elderly. '*A city for everyone!* — this is Gothenburg's slogan,' said Vice-President Viviane Reding, the EU's Justice Commissioner. 'People with disabilities still face too many barriers in everyday life, but cities like Gothenburg are leading the way in making life more accessible for all.' The second prize went to Grenoble and the third to Poznan.

## ***Day 2. Europe: Ready for You***

### ***Opening speeches***

Despite the economic downturn, the first eight months of 2013 saw a record 747 million international tourist arrivals worldwide, a 5 % increase over the previous year. All regions shared in this growth but, **Zoltán Somogyi** emphasised, Europe benefited the most, as it is the world's top tourist destination. He is the Executive Director of the **World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)**, which fully supports accessible tourism for all. Accessibility should be integrated into all tourist facilities, products and services, he said — ideally from their very inception, or if not, through the adaptation of existing tourism assets. Accessibility is both an ethical imperative and a business opportunity. Providing accurate information to travellers with disabilities, shaping and marketing tourism destinations in accordance with universal design principles, and offering better access to tourism sites, can make all the difference between gaining and losing visitors. Universal accessibility benefits all of us. The UNWTO has been mainstreaming accessibility into the global tourism agenda, in cooperation with disability associations. Its recommendations on accessible tourism for all, adopted in 2013, highlight the need to provide clear information on the accessibility of tourism facilities. Its new manual on accessible tourism will be available, also online, at the beginning of 2014.

People with disabilities often have difficulty in obtaining reliable information, so that must be a priority for action on accessibility, **Rosa Estarás Ferragut** told the conference. She is a Member of the **European Parliament** and is on its Committee for Transport and Tourism. At the moment, information on the accessibility of sites is not available in a harmonised format, she pointed out. The logos often mean different things in different Member States. Europe needs to remain the world's No. 1 tourist destination, but that means achieving accessibility at all levels. The EU has done a lot of work in this area. It has commissioned studies of people's needs. It has supported innovative projects to improve training in the sector. The European Commission and Parliament are currently working on *Connecting Europe* — linking up the different modes of transport. But transport also has to be adjusted to people's specific requirements. Accessibility via digital technology is very important.

### ***Session 3. Unlocking the potential of Accessible Europe. Driving growth at national and local level.***

Chairing this session was **Ivor Ambrose**, Managing Director of **European Network Accessible Tourism (ENAT)**.

There is clear evidence that accessible tourism produces economic benefits, **Jesús Hernández Galán** insisted. He is Director of Universal Accessibility at **ONCE**, the National Organisation of Blind People in Spain. A survey made by one municipality in the Canary Islands showed that tourists with disabilities spent an average of €178 per day, he reported, whereas the regular tourist average was €125. The difference was due mainly to the use of higher-quality hotels and the hiring of special equipment. Another favourable factor for the tourist industry is that the vast majority of travellers with disabilities bring an accompanying person with them. Also, 35 % of tourists with disabilities prefer to travel out of season. They are loyal customers, as they tend to stay more than once at the same place. Spain has taken a holistic approach to accessibility. Accessibility standards are also seen as quality standards. EU regional funds have had a strong impact on the development of accessibility in Spain, notably to tourist sites. ONCE has worked with the UNWTO on accessible tourism, as well as with a number of universities in Spain on a *Design for All* component in courses. This is now required in architecture courses, hotel and catering courses and others, but not all institutions have so far complied with that obligation. There is

also a need to work more closely with public authorities, so that they can incorporate accessibility into their daily work on town planning, transport and technology.

Accessibility need not be very expensive, and in any case it is a worthwhile investment. The case of a hotel near Padua was cited by **Marino Finozzi, Minister of Tourism and International Trade for Italy's Veneto Region**. The hotel decided to become fully accessible for people with disabilities. The total outlay was €26 000, which it recouped within 18 months. In 2010, the Italian government allocated resources for projects of excellence. Veneto presented its own project on accessible tourism and received €2 million in funding. The project has three strands: training tour operators to present a safe and secure destination; promoting new investment to improve the offer; and fostering new synergies between public administrations and the private sector. An initial 'snapshot' of the existing infrastructure showed that accessibility was already quite good. What was lacking was information. Each year, Veneto makes its accessibility progress known at international fairs — notably the Vicenza fair on accessible tourism.

England is out to 'harness the growing, high-value accessible tourism market,' **Ross Calladine** said. He is the Head of Business Support at the English tourist board **Visit England**. Its research shows that over £2 billion (more than €2.4 billion) are spent each year by people with disabilities travelling in and to England and those travelling with them. Visit England is also producing itineraries for people with access needs. Four destinations were selected. In each of them, eight tourism venues (hotels, attractions, etc.) were set an 'access development process', which they went through from October 2012 and have now completed. It was structured around 'the three pillars of accessible tourism: information and promotion, customer service and the physical facilities'. Online training was provided for all the staff of the businesses involved. People with disabilities were invited to do a 'mystery shop' (unannounced visit) to test these businesses and provide feedback. Each business has to provide an 'access statement' — an up-to-date written description of its accessibility. The second part of the project, to be launched in March 2014, will be England's first-ever mainstream national marketing campaign for accessible tourism. He hoped to work with European partners in future on producing further accessible itineraries. Visit England is also preparing guidance for tourism businesses on their legal obligation to welcome assistance dogs.

**Frans Bobeldijk**, from the **European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH)**, asked how information can be made more visual. For instance, can hotels provide subtitled TV and visual fire alarms? **Ross Calladine** replied that Visit England has worked with a leading charity to produce some guidance for tourism businesses on the key issues for people with hearing loss — including safety, fire alarms and evacuation, hearing loops, and telecommunications issues such as subtitling on TVs. **Jesús Hernández Fernandez** noted that some Spanish hotels provide vibrating devices for wake-up calls to people with hearing loss. Easy reading devices are also being developed for people with intellectual difficulties. **Donata Vivanti** reported that four years ago, an Italian hotel turned away a young autistic client on the grounds that he might disturb other guests. **Marino Finozzi** commented that operators sometimes have difficulty in knowing how to deal with different needs. Hence the importance of training. He hoped there would be no more such cases in future. **Carlo del Favero**, from the **Italian Association of People with Down Syndrome**, asked where he can find information about Down syndrome accessibility in Veneto. **Marino Finozzi** said Venice has tourist routes that are clearly mapped out for people with impairments. This information can be found on the official websites for Venice and Veneto. But information is indeed still one of the main challenges to be addressed. **Mari Siilsalu** asked how staff are trained to deal with food intolerance and special diets. **Ross Calladine** pointed out that special food requirements can be a matter of food intolerance, religious belief or simply lifestyle. The next issue of the Visit England magazine for tourist businesses will have a special article about food choices, how to cater for them and how they have evolved. The industry needs to be educated about this increasingly important area.

#### **Session 4. Barrier-free tourism for success: how they did it.**

This session was chaired by **Roberto Vitali**. He is the President of **Village 4All**, an international tourism quality brand guaranteeing ‘accessible accommodation — accommodation for everyone’.

*I Girasoli (Sunflowers)* is a holiday centre run in the Tuscan countryside by the **Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association (AIMS)**. As AISM Project Manager **Marco Pizzio** told the conference, the centre has 51 hotel rooms, 10 bungalows, meeting rooms, swimming pools and sports facilities, a bar and a restaurant that serves gluten-free and other anti-allergy meals. The centre is fully accessible throughout and provides special equipment free of charge. Staff are trained to listen to their guests and act on the information they provide. Accessible transfers are provided between airports and the centre. The concierge provides information on accessible tourist venues in the region. Guests can also opt for the centre’s own eight-day *Tuscany for All* tour around the region. An all-inclusive package in every sense of the term. In 2014, the association also plans to launch a European accessible tour. *I Girasoli* is professionally marketed, and since October 2010 the emphasis has been on mainstreaming — it is being sold as a holiday centre for everyone. As a result, room nights increased by 51 % between 2010 and 2012. The proportion of guests from other countries rose from 5 % of total room nights in 2010 to 29 % in 2012. A new AISM project is *Italy Without Barriers*, which draws on the association’s experience to provide accessible tourism services and advice to businesses, associations and public bodies.

EDEN stands for *European Destinations of Excellence*. Each year, this EU-backed project picks out and promotes a sustainable tourism destination in each participating country. In 2013, the Austrian winner was the picturesque Tyrolean valley of Kaunertal. As **Florian van der Bellen** from **Kaunertal Tourismus** explained, the valley has been hosting barrier-free holidays for over 30 years now. The Kaunertal glacier was developed for leisure in the 1970–80s. A road leads up to a car park next to the ski lift at an altitude of 2 750 m. A restaurant on the glacier was built ‘barrier-free’ from the start. That was more by chance than by planning, but it proved to be a useful coincidence. In the 1980s, Kaunertal was discovered by monoskiers — a group of whom it had not really been aware. People in wheelchairs found they could drive all the way up to the ski lifts by car. A smart local entrepreneur, who already ran a hotel, noticed the number of people in wheelchairs up on the glacier. So he took the risk of adding 25 completely barrier-free rooms to his four-star hotel. To reach the Alpine meadows, at around 2 000 m, people in wheelchairs use SWISS-TRAC power units to pull their chairs up the gradients. Sledges adapted to wheelchairs are available in the winter months. For people unable to use monoskis, there is a ski on which the visitor can sit while the instructor stands at the back. Kaunertal’s success in this field is due to luck, vision and good, gradual integration, he said, but also to its provision of reliable information about the barrier-free facilities available. People have to travel a long way to get there, so it is important not to make any false promises.

Fencers are fighters, but Italy’s **Beatrice (‘Bebe’) Vio** has had to fight more than most. And she has won. A torchbearer at the 2012 London Paralympics, she is the **2013 Wheelchair World Fencing Champion**. ‘I started fencing when I was five,’ she told the conference. Then in 2008, at the age of 11, ‘I fell ill and my arms and legs were amputated. But after that, I wanted to get back to fencing. I felt empty without it. So I started contacting various organisations. Eventually we set up the association art4sport ([www.art4sport.org](http://www.art4sport.org)) which enabled me to get the prosthetic arm I needed to start fencing again.’ When she is travelling, ‘aircraft seating is sometimes a problem. And there are difficulties in some hotels — with getting into the bathroom, for instance. But OK, I cope.’ The art4sport association encourages its members to take part in competitive sports, right up to the Paralympics in some cases. Some youngsters are understandably hesitant about ‘putting themselves on show,’ she said. ‘But often, the problem isn’t the children at all. It’s their parents. Children with disabilities do grow up, like everybody else. There are all the usual teenage problems. But we want to live our dreams and have a good time. We have to get on with our lives.’

**Roberto Vitali** asked how tourism businesses can take different categories of disability into account. **Florian van der Bellen** felt that talking to the people involved and working out a solution with them is the most important step. **Marco Pizzio** agreed that listening and understanding are key. The experience gained may then be used in other cases as appropriate, but each individual has different needs — including each individual with disabilities.

### ***Session 5. Unlocking the potential of Open Europe. Accessibility beyond disability.***

The chairman for this session was **Greg Richards**, from the **ATLAS** cultural tourism research project.

The *e-Create* project aims to increase the competitiveness of service-oriented tourism enterprises, especially in rural areas and along cultural routes, mainly through the use of modern ICT. It has been collecting and analysing good practices in this field. Some of them were described by **Christin Prange** from one of the project's partners — **Transromanica**, which connects and represents the Romanesque heritage of eight European countries. Along the Romanesque Road in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt, for instance, visitors can download a navigation app that helps them to find points of interest, accommodation, gastronomic establishments, etc. At the same time, it assists citizens and entrepreneurs, for example by providing them with information about the opening hours of public institutions or investment policies. In Norway, the *Kumin* project emphasises story-telling. As well as traditional signs, this cultural site has QR codes. By scanning them, visitors will be led to audiovisual material on the Kumin website. In Poland, *gpsfriendly.com* enables the exchange of travel information among users — suggested routes, for example. There is a similar app in Italy.

In 2002, the Commonwealth Games took the decision to fully integrate parasport within its schedule and teams. This is a different approach, **David Grevenberg** emphasised, and it requires a different consciousness about accessibility. He is the CEO of the **Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games**. 30% of the Games venues are new builds, and in these cases accessibility has been much easier to achieve. For the 70 % that were already in situ, retrofitting for accessibility has been much more difficult, but nonetheless very important for a city with global ambitions and a global future. Accessibility has also been ensured for the associated infrastructure, from historical sites and transport to restaurants. By cooperating closely with the tourism sector on this, the Games will help to create a long-term legacy for Glasgow in terms of accessibility and inclusivity. Care has been taken to include people with disabilities among staff recruits, and to train staff on accessibility issues. A food charter has been launched which will cover a wide range of dietary needs and will in future be used as the standard for events in Scotland. Major events like the Games have the ability to be transformative. Building your brand means living your brand, and that means practising what you preach.

Increased support for all types of European cultural activities will be given by the EU's new *Creative Europe* programme. Most of its budget will be spent on small multilateral cooperation projects, said **Karel Bartak**, **European Commission, DG Education and Culture**. The majority of the projects supported are oriented towards special groups, including people with disabilities. The cultural budget will rise by 9 % at a time when most EU budgets are decreasing. The cultural and creative sector in Europe represents around 5 % of GDP and more than 3 % of the workforce. The EU has been very keen to promote heritage protection, and this will remain an important element of the new programme, which will run from 2014 to 2020.

Accessible tourism is one of the priorities set by **NECSTouR**, the network of European regions for sustainable and competitive tourism. **Patrick Torrent**, Deputy Director of the **Catalan Tourism Board** and a NECSTouR founding member, said this priority has four main axes: facilities; training; IT and communication; and transport and infrastructure. Cooperation between the public and private sectors

must be at the heart of accessible tourism. Accessibility is part of the model for responsible, sustainable tourism. It opens the door to innovation. It is also crosscutting, so we need platforms to work together.

**Jamie Bolling** dislikes the term ‘special needs’. She asked **David Grevenberg** if he ever uses it and if not, how he gets around it. He agreed that the way language is used is very important. Everyone has different abilities. We must avoid using language that ‘makes someone more disabled than they already are’. **Lidia Best** asked if there will be hearing loops at the Glasgow Games, and captioning on the giant screens — something that was missing at the London Olympics. **David Grevenberg** replied that BBC coverage will be used on the screens, with the advantage that captioning will be possible. Hearing loops may be provided, but this will depend on the budgets available. **Jean Bernard Titz**, from **Telecom Valley** in France, asked what will be done to make it easier for small companies to make submissions for European projects. **Karel Bartak** suggested that *Creative Europe* is one of the simpler European programmes to apply to, and the commitment for the forthcoming period is to be as simple and effective as possible. **Pedro Ortún, European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry**, noted that his Directorate is developing five major tourism-related IT tools.

A representative of people with **intellectual disabilities** felt that intellectual disability had been left completely out of consideration in the conference programme. The websites of the European Commission and Parliament are not accessible for people with intellectual disabilities, she said. And how many people with disabilities had actually been involved in the organisation of this conference? The lunch tables, for instance, were not accessible for people in wheelchairs, she stated. **Tania Tsiora, European Commission, DG Justice**, explained that the event is co-organised each year with the European Disability Forum. Organisations of people with intellectual disabilities are involved. An easy-to-read version of the conference programme and discussion paper is provided for people with intellectual disabilities. The Commission takes care to ensure that the conference venue is fully accessible. This includes providing lower-height lunch tables for people in wheelchairs. **Antonella Correr, European Commission**, added that the Commission is cooperating with the European Association for Services for People with Disabilities to ensure that the new EU portal on tourism SME start-ups is fully accessible for people with all types of disability.

### ***Session 6. Removing non-physical barriers to travel.***

Chairing this session was **Michel De Blust, European Travel Agents and Tour Operators Association (ECTAA)**.

A growing number of people from outside the EU have the wish and the financial means to take European cruises, **Marco Digiòia** said. He is the Director of Government Affairs at **CLIA Europe**, the European section of the Cruise Lines International Association. After the Caribbean, the Mediterranean is the world’s second most popular cruise destination, but visa procedures for non-EU nationals are a major barrier to the further development of the European cruise industry, he stated. According to the latest figures, more than 6 million potential passengers have been lost because they abandoned their visa applications. He called for the simplification, harmonisation and acceleration of EU countries’ procedures for the issuing of short-stay visas. Multiple-entry Schengen visas should also be facilitated.

The EU’s Package Travel Directive is currently being revised. **Robert Mathiak, European Commission, DG Justice**, emphasised that the 1990 Directive covers packages only, not standalone services. It gives consumers a number of rights, notably to pre-contractual information, to identification of one single operator or retailer who is responsible for the correct performance of the services, and to refunds and repatriation if an operator goes bankrupt. A new directive is needed mainly due to the rise of online bookings for travel packages, as the present Directive applies specifically to prearranged combinations. In the case of dynamic combinations, it is very uncertain whether the current rules apply. Worryingly, a recent survey showed the majority of EU citizens are unaware that they are not protected when buying



such products. The revised directive proposed by the Commission would protect almost 120 million additional trips per year, as the rules for prearranged packages would also apply to customised package combinations and some other looser combinations. New cancellation rights and a cap of 10 % on price increases would also be included. Businesses would benefit from fairer competition within the sector, greater certainty, more cross-border trade through better harmonisation and some reductions in business costs — for example, through the abolition of specific rules for travel brochures. The European Parliament will probably vote on the proposal in March 2014.

**Pedro Ortún, European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry**, disputed claims that the European travel industry is overregulated. Only four specific pieces of EU legislation apply to it — fewer than for many other sectors. The legal framework is balanced and positive, he said, and anyone who is not happy with it would have the opportunity to reply to the forthcoming online consultation by the Commission. The proposed Package Travel Directive revisions will effectively deal with one issue. On visa procedures, a review is underway and legislative proposals will be made.

**Monique Goyens, Director-General of the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC)**, mentioned that it works closely with its sister organisation ANEC, the European consumer voice in standardisation, to ensure better consumer protection for people with special needs. BEUC's own work on issues such as clear labelling is also of obvious relevance to more vulnerable consumers. As regards tourism, what consumers want is a seamless travel experience in a very transparent tourism market. We are not completely there yet, she said. The EU does have a large number of consumer protection measures in this field, but it is a patchwork and consumers have difficulty in finding their way around it. She welcomed the proposal for the revision of the Package Travel Directive, which contains many improvements. However, the definitions need to be more tightly drawn and liabilities more clearly identified. And in the age of the internet, retroactive price increases should simply no longer be allowed. Online booking means that prices can be adjusted whenever necessary. Non-optional choices within a travel contract should be included in the advertised price. The various extras mean that there is often a huge difference between the price advertised and the price actually paid.

**Jonas Neihardt, Senior Vice-President, Government Affairs, at Hilton Worldwide**, supported the call for visa reform. Most governments, including those in the EU, still use procedures involving a lot of paperwork and, in many cases, a lengthy journey-before-a-journey to a visa office. This is a burden on all travellers, but more particularly on those with limited mobility. A requirement to apply in person is discouraging millions of potential tourists from China and other countries. And yet statistics for the US show that each Chinese visitor spends on average US\$7 100 there (over €5 200) per trip, airfare not included. We are all missing a huge economic opportunity, he felt. When the US government took a few limited measures to tackle the backlog on visas for Chinese citizens, applications rose by 40 % and Hilton saw a 51 % increase in Chinese guests at its American hotels. He pointed to the visa application procedure used by Australia. The whole process is conducted online and, strictly speaking, the applicant does not even have to print the visa out. Its issue is electronically confirmed to immigration officers at the point of entry. The online technology is now tried and tested, and it is more accessible for people with disabilities. This is, he suggested, one of those cases in which the widespread adoption of an accessible technology would be in everybody's interests.

### ***Concluding remarks***

Accessible tourism not only means a large potential market. It also means that the principles underpinning the European project are reflected in concrete actions. **Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the European Commission**, emphasised this in his concluding remarks. Dignity, equality and solidarity are, he said, founding principles of the European Union. We implement them by protecting the rights of the less advantaged. Accessible tourism is a way of ensuring the full participation of people with disabilities, but also a successful strategy to improve our tourism offer in Europe and guarantee our world leadership



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in the sector. We need to create tourism that is tailored to the requirements of people with disabilities, but also the elderly and people with small children. We must make sure that tourism becomes more accessible. So far, its potential has not been fully tapped. Targeted investment is required, but it need not always be huge. It would be a way of stimulating competitiveness and growth between 2014 and 2020. All regional and national authorities need to consider accessibility projects. New investment in this field can lead to new industries, producing specialised equipment. On the question of visas for non-EU citizens, the Commission is working on the adoption of a proposal, within the coming months, that would reduce the number of nationalities requiring a visa. For instance, it does not make sense that the citizens of some countries that have free trade agreements with the EU nonetheless require visas. We need to attract more tourists from countries like Russia and China — and that includes tourists with reduced mobility. The EU's COSME programme for the competitiveness of enterprises has a specific section on the tourist sector. The Commission has also launched a public consultation on future challenges and opportunities for the tourism sector, and to assess the impact of the regulatory framework for tourism in the EU.