

**Message of Commission Vice-President G. Verheugen
to the participants of the 2006 European Tourism Forum**

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

Welcome to the 5th European Tourism Forum. My work commitments did unfortunately not allow me to join you for this important event. I, however, wanted to use this opportunity to share with you again my personal commitment to the development of a sustainable and competitive European tourism industry.

Indeed, tourism is one of the biggest and fast expanding European economic sectors and its importance will continue to increase together with the disposable income and leisure time of our citizens. Tourism is also an area with strong untapped potential, where entrepreneurs can fully express their creativity and capacity to innovate. That is why tourism plays a major role in our efforts to create more growth and jobs for European citizens and strengthen cohesion. With Europe being the most popular destination in the world, tourism also represents a crucial contribution to our international competitiveness. We should be proud of the attractiveness of the European territory and strive to maintain it.

This can only be achieved through policies that enhance the competitiveness of our tourist industry while preserving and enhancing our cultural and natural heritage. This is the kind of tourism we

committed ourselves to promote. In full respect of the subsidiarity principle, we will continue to mainstream tourism into the wide range of related community policies and promote partnership between the large variety of stakeholders.

We are particularly encouraged by the positive reactions to our renewed tourism policy and appreciate the spirit of cooperation that developed inside the Tourism Sustainability Group. At the beginning of next year this group will present a report which will thereafter be discussed with the main stakeholders. On this basis, it is the Commission's intention to prepare, in late 2007, a Communication concerning an Agenda 21 for European tourism. I count on your support in assisting us throughout this process.

The annual European Tourism Forum is an excellent opportunity to discuss current trends and plan ahead together, to network and to raise awareness. We are grateful to Cyprus for hosting this year's Forum in collaboration with the Finnish Presidency. The island of Aphrodite is an ideal tourism destination and an excellent venue to discuss about tourism. I hope that its beauty will be the best inspiration for your work.

I wish every success to your works.

Thank you.