

**Antonis Michaelides, Minister of Commerce, Industry and  
Tourism**

**Opening/Plenary Session Speech  
European Tourism Forum, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2006**

**New Opportunities for growth for European Tourism, through  
partnerships, technology and innovation and changing lifestyles  
of tourists**

**Food for thought and action**

Your excellencies

Dear Colleagues

Dear Guests

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all here today to the 5<sup>th</sup> European Tourism Forum, Cyprus 2006.

Thank you, foremost, Finnish Presidency and you personally, Minister Pekkarinen, for entrusting us with the organisation of this Forum. We are honoured for your trust to the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. Thanks also to the European Commission and to the Steering Group for their support and contribution to making this event a reality.

When undertaking this task we were fully aware of the responsibility and the challenges we had to meet. I hope, that during these two days we will have a constructive dialogue and our results will be of use to every one of us separately, and for European tourism jointly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ambitious goals of the European Union set in Lisbon six years ago, have called us up to deliver stronger and sustainable growth, more and better jobs and to establish Europe as the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world. To this end the tourism industry can play a major role. This potential is not just accepted but is by now expected.

The Tourism Sector, in its most narrow definition has a four percent contribution (4%) to the Community's GDP and total labour force of about eight million jobs. When the links to the other sectors are taken into account, its contribution to GDP is about eleven percent (11%) and to employment twelve percent (12%). Our aim should not only be to sustain this status but to enhance it.

Yet, the competition is global, the distances have shortened and tourism is already international. We, the players of the European tourism sector, are collectively facing growth that is however lower than the world growth rates average. In fact, on the one hand, Europe faces competition from new destinations which are entering the marketplace. On the other hand, Europe is a mature destination which has to safeguard itself. At the same time it has to persuade its clientele of its adaptability to current trends and demand, in a sustainable and creative manner. Thus, the strive for investing in our

competitive advantages and projecting these advantages effectively should be an ongoing process.

**(The national (Cyprus') contribution to the Lisbon goals and to enhance competitiveness)**

From our end, Cyprus has set tourism as a priority policy in its national Lisbon Programme. The upgrading and enrichment of the tourist product is one of the major policies for increasing the competitive position of our economy. These actions are in line with our long lasting national Tourism Development Strategy which leads us to the year 2010. Both, for its preparation and its implementation, all of the tourism industry stakeholders collaborate in order to achieve its targets. It is a continuous process of an open dialogue and partnership. The Cypriot strategic advancement plan aims at competitiveness through sustainable economic, social and environmental development. It promotes new market segments and enriching products responding to the market demand, such as coastal, cruise and nautical tourism, health and pampering, sports, cultural, religious and nature-related activities.

For the following two days, we, the European Union tourism industry stakeholders – academics and practitioners, have been called up through this major European platform to submit views and exchange ideas on three issues which challenge the competitive ability of our industry: Innovative Technologies, Trends and Markets, Partnerships and Financial Opportunities. Our topics integrate the different yet interrelated and interdependent players of the tourism arena: the consumer, the destination and the employer.

In Cyprus we believe that all these issues can be exploited so as to serve the goal for enriching our tourism product. Regarding innovative utilization of technologies in the field of tourism, we have embarked on an e-marketing strategy and action plan through which amongst other, we are implementing a new web portal which will lead the way to further deployment of electronic Marketing methods - Customer Relationship Management System, Data base marketing. Also, we are represented in the European Tourism Portal for the promotion of Europe as a tourist destination worldwide.

Partnerships, mostly public-private, constitute one of the declared priorities of our Government. In this respect, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism will soon establish the one stop shop for providing assistance to large investors. The Larnaca and Paphos International airports, the marinas and golf courses will be developed through this financial instrument.

Regarding new trends and new markets, the various tourism market segments, their socioeconomic changes and behavioural patterns, are being examined through market research studies which are carried out on a systematic basis. Investments in tourism are being led by the results of these studies. Tourism products are being developed to meet the expectations of established and new market segments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Vice-President Commissionaire Veurheugen's message which will be heard in a while, honours and highlights the significance of this Forum for the advancement of the European tourism. I look forward to hearing the Commissionaire's views and directions and the suggestions of my distinguished colleagues, Ministers Pekkarinen and Dimech.

I now declare the opening of the Fifth European Tourism Forum, Cyprus 2006, and I give the floor to Minister Pekkarinen.