

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE

## COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

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RECOMMENDATION No. R (97) 9

### OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON A POLICY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY TOURISM IN COASTAL AREAS

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 June 1997  
at the 594th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Recommendation No. R (94) 7 on a general policy for sustainable and environment-friendly tourism development;

Having regard to Recommendation No. R (95) 10 on a sustainable tourist development policy in protected areas;

Having regard to Recommendation No. R (84) 2 on the European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter;

Having regard to the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, which was approved at the Ministerial Conference held in Sofia from 23 to 25 October 1995 on an "Environment for Europe";

Bearing in mind the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area and the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, notably;

Taking into account the action programme Agenda 21, adopted on 14 June 1992 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, which gives priority to coastal areas;

Considering that coastal areas are transitional areas between the mainland and the sea, and that they play an essential role in controlling the transfer of materials, energy and pollutants between the two systems;

Considering that coastal areas are systems of great biological, geophysical, landscape, cultural and economic richness, and that they thus constitute a resource and common heritage for all individuals and societies which should be preserved for present and future generations;

Stressing that coastal ecosystems, including the hinterland as well as the coastal strip, are particularly fragile because of edaphic, climatic and hydrological conditions, and are among the most threatened ecosystems;

Concerned at the increasing pressures on coastal areas, particularly in the Mediterranean region, owing to urban and industrial development and the rapid growth of tourism and leisure activities;

Aware of the danger of the intensive exploitation for the purposes of tourism of coastal areas which are still intact, particularly in countries in transition;

Recognising that, although coastal tourism may be a major instrument of economic development for many regions and countries, particularly islands, it can also, if implemented in an intensive manner, cause considerable and sometimes irreversible damage to the natural and socio-cultural environment;

Stressing that the quality of the marine environment, the preservation of fish stocks and of the biological equilibrium, and the maintenance of biological diversity are very much dependent on the proper management of coastal activities;

Convinced of the need to set up national, regional and local policies for the integrated management of coastal areas coupled with respect for the environment and the sustainable exploitation of resources,

Recommends that the governments of member states:

- a. base their tourism development policy, and in particular their financial incentives, on the principles and measures set out in the appendix to this recommendation, tailoring them where necessary to the special features or fragility of certain regions;
- b. ensure that national, regional and local authorities, those institutions responsible for tourism and the environment, the tourist industry and all other sectors involved are duly informed of this recommendation and ensure that they respect the principles set out in the appendix hereto;
- c. devise joint strategies between different states to promote balanced tourism development.

#### *Appendix to Recommendation No. R (97) 9*

### **I. General principles**

All policies on the planning and development of coastal areas for the purposes of tourism must be based on the following principles:

- prevention, precaution and remedial action allied with the need for sustainable development, as defined at the Rio de Janeiro Conference;
- repair of damage caused to the environment;
- proper management of cultural and natural resources, particularly water resources, in proportion to their capacity for renewal, adopting a long-term approach;
- tourism development which complies with quality requirements and respects each area's specific features;
- limiting tourism development to a level compatible with the ecological and social carrying capacity of the site;
- urbanisation which is strictly controlled and which ensures specific protection of areas of great scientific, ecological, cultural or archaeological interest;
- tourism development which is designed to meet the needs of the local community and protect its socio-economic interests;
- balanced development of the hinterland;
- protection of noteworthy coastal habitats and areas, particularly the wetlands;
- balance between the various activities, such as agriculture, fishing and industry;
- free access to the coast while respecting natural values.

### **II. Implementation of general principles**

These general principles should be implemented by adopting the following measures:

1. *Protection*
  - a. Legislation should be enacted which provides for the protection of a considerable part of the coastal strip, the width of which should extend to the natural land/sea limits.

- b. Particular protected status should be granted to as many land or sea areas as possible, particularly those which are noteworthy sites or landscapes or are characteristic of the natural and cultural heritage of the region or country, and which are necessary for maintaining biological or coastal equilibrium or are of ecological importance.
- c. Areas which are still intact and particularly vulnerable should, through a policy of controlling land use, be protected by purchase, rental or management agreements.
- d. Free public access should be guaranteed, while ensuring that this right is exercised without jeopardising the interests of landowners, nature or the environment.

## 2. *Controlling coastal development*

a. A simultaneously global and local approach should be brought to planning programmes for coastal tourist development. These programmes should be the subject of discussion and co-operation between all the institutional decision makers, partners and communities concerned, and should be implemented:

- after having carried out an inventory of natural and cultural resources and an environmental assessment;
- taking into account the physical and social carrying capacity of the sites concerned, as well as their natural, landscape, cultural and socio-economic characteristics;
- making all development projects which are likely to have a significant effect on the environment subject to an impact study.

b. The development of coastal and marine regions for tourism should be planned using spatial/regional instruments and town-planning and environmental management documents, in particular comprehensive land-use plans.

These instruments should:

- provide for strict use of land, to limit the negative effects of speculation;
- contribute to intersectoral co-operation;
- promote effective use of existing facilities and infrastructures in order to reduce needs for new constructions;
- maintain the diversity of the natural landscape features of coastal areas;
- specify the role and use of coastal areas, to this end listing possible functions in order of priority;
- provide for areas where building and activities are strictly controlled and for other areas where building is completely prohibited;
- provide for sufficient space to enable other activities (for example agriculture and fishing) to take place;
- encourage the use of tourist amenities not only by tourists but also by the local community.

c. The rehabilitation of degraded coastal resorts should be promoted.

## 3. *Control of activities likely to harm the natural environment*

a. Urbanisation and control of building through:

- i. the strict control of building within a strip extending at least 100 to 300 metres from the mean water line landwards and seawards;
- ii. avoiding urbanisation in natural, non-built-up areas and in high-risk areas;
- iii. avoiding large constructions, particularly in areas where they are easily visible;
- iv. putting existing buildings to new uses where appropriate, and taking advantage of disused buildings rather than authorising the construction of new infrastructures;
- v. drawing up guidelines with the aim of integrating architecture into the local environment; these guidelines should cover, in particular, materials used and building height, to ensure that new buildings or rehabilitated old buildings blend in with the traditional local style;
- vi. the provision of accommodation units of various sizes so as to avoid dependence on a particular type of tourism;
- vii. imposing strict rules regarding the collection and treatment of waste and sewage;
- viii. encouraging free access to the coast while respecting its natural values;
- ix. limiting the need for new yachting harbours through a more effective use of existing harbour capacity and by encouraging the use of natural anchorages which are already marked out.

- b. Regulation of other activities linked to tourism which are likely to harm the environment through:
- i. prohibiting, as far as possible, the creation of new road infrastructures in dune areas;
  - ii. prohibiting off-road motor-car traffic and parking, especially on beaches, dunes, and dune strips;
  - iii. controlling the establishment of caravan sites, camping sites, marinas and golf courses;
  - iv. limiting parking to specific parking areas;
  - v. controlling water sports and leisure activities (coral collecting, hunting and fishing, activities in spawning and nesting areas);
  - vi. limiting the noise pollution resulting from tourist amenities.

4. *Monitoring and combating pollution*

- it should be ensured that all tourist developments, once completed, comply with the various rules and regulations adopted for the protection of the environment;
- the effect of tourist activities on the coast should be regularly assessed and it should be ensured that the carrying capacity of tourist regions is not exceeded;
- appropriate standards on drinking water, bathing water, seawater and sewage should be taken into account, and the discharge and emission of toxic substances should be reduced;
- sewage treatment installations in coastal resorts should be accounted for, including connection to the main drain and sewage systems and to recycling and waste disposal systems, using equipment appropriate to the nature of the site and the number of tourists, and regularly checking the satisfactory operation of these installations;
- instruments to monitor pollution should be installed, and the means of tackling pollution from land-based sources, including tourist facilities, or from pollution arising from disasters such as oil spills should be provided;
- co-operation with other sectors whose activities have an effect on the coast should be developed;
- technological innovations and ways of minimising water and energy consumption and the production of waste should be promoted;
- motor-car and water-borne traffic should be restricted; this traffic should be strictly regulated on shores and coastal waters; public transport should be promoted and less noisy and less polluting modes of transport together with pedestrian zones and walks should be encouraged;
- it should be ensured that beaches are regularly cleaned, that the systematic microbiological monitoring of water quality is provided for, and that the public is kept informed.

5. *Diversifying tourist services*

- a. Forms of tourism should be promoted which put the emphasis on “quality” and:
- respect the interdependence and complementary nature of the coastal area and hinterland;
  - offer products other than those geared to seaside resorts, that is, products which focus more on the natural, cultural and historical resources of the hinterland.
- b. Services should be organised in order to spread the tourist season over a longer period, to combat the summer overload which disrupts the social fabric, to use existing installations for a longer period, and to improve the employment situation.
- c. The current mechanisms and strategies to market coastal areas and the products offered should be reviewed, placing greater emphasis on the promotion and development of the various natural and cultural assets of specific areas rather than focusing solely on the marketing of tourist accommodation and related services and facilities.

6. *Using economic and tax instruments and incentives*

- a. The development of tax incentives to promote environment-friendly tourism development projects should be studied.
- b. Seals of approval such as the *Pavillon bleu* (“Blue Flag”) should be awarded, which serve both as a means of promotion and as a reward to coastal municipalities for efforts to improve the quality of their general environment, bathing water and sewage treatment.
- c. Some of the users’ or visitors’ taxes should be used, where these exist, to finance sewage systems and to acquire, maintain and manage certain natural habitats.

d. The award of financial backing for tourist projects should be made conditional upon their taking into account the principles and measures described in this recommendation.

7. *Information, training and research*

a. Awareness-raising campaigns and training programmes should be developed for:

– tourists and tourism professionals, in order to increase their awareness of the quality of the environment and not only of the appeal, but also of the vulnerability of certain sites, of the value of an often under-rated heritage and of local culture and traditions;

– decision makers, in order to enable them to choose the most appropriate and viable type of development for their municipalities;

– local authority staff and local teams responsible either for promoting tourism or for operating specific amenities;

– local inhabitants, in order to make them aware not only of the attractive features of their region but also of the vulnerability of the areas in which they live;

– officials responsible for town planning, restoration and rehabilitation, in order to help them promote environment-friendly architecture.

b. Research and training for local authorities and decision makers on management of the ecosystems and natural resources of coastal areas should be developed.

The following areas in particular should be covered:

– the relationship between the land and the sea, and the links between the two systems;

– the quality of seawater;

– sewage treatment and collection;

– management of drinking and non-drinking water supplies;

c. Interpretation programmes should be developed to increase awareness of the coastal heritage.

d. Tourism and environmental organisations should be involved in the above activities.

8. *Co-operation*

Co-operation between municipalities, regions and countries should be developed in order to:

– avoid the negative effects of competition on the environment;

– develop financial instruments to share, in a fairer way, the costs of tourism and the income from tourism between the different municipalities of a given tourist region;

– devise common action plans for countries with adjacent coastal areas, in order to harmonise objectives regarding the development of coastal areas, co-ordinate work and prevent one country from taking insufficient conservation measures so as to obtain advantages;

– optimise the value of the heritage of coastal areas, while at the same time underpinning the need to protect that heritage.