

EU Intelligence Report

April 2017



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

TOURISM

[European Accessibility Act – Tourism not included in latest positions by European Parliament and Council](#)

EMPLOYMENT/LABOUR SKILLS

[European Commission launches European Pillar of Social Rights, including Directive on work-life balance](#)

CONSUMER ISSUES

[Geo-blocking – IMCO Committee adopts its Report](#)

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Brexit

Theresa May calls snap election as UK Tourism Association stresses importance of visa-free access

On 18th April, UK Prime Minister Theresa May announced that she would call a general election, in an unexpected move that could have a significant impact on the Brexit negotiations. The UK Parliament voted by a wide margin in favour of the government motion for an election, and general elections will therefore take place on 8th June.

May's Conservative Party currently enjoys a wide poll lead over the main opposition Labour Party, and is expected to increase its currently narrow Parliamentary majority. The move is therefore seen as a bid to secure a mandate for the government's vision of Brexit, and strengthen the UK's hand in the negotiations with the EU.

Meanwhile, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has emphasized the importance to the tourism sector of maintaining visa-free travel between the UK and the EU post-Brexit. In a [statement](#) on 4th April, the ABTA's Chief Executive Mark Tanzer stated that "Travel and tourism is one of the UK's largest industries and it is vital that the Government makes sure it can continue to

thrive during and after the negotiations." The UK government has been criticized for arguing that no deal on Brexit is better than a bad deal for the UK, with stakeholders arguing that no deal would be highly damaging for the tourism sector.

Tourism Policy

European Accessibility Act – Tourism not included in latest positions by European Parliament and Council

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COUNCIL

On April 25th the Internal Market and Consumer Affairs (IMCO) Committee adopted the draft report by [MEP Løkkegaard](#) (Liberals, Denmark) to the Commission [proposal](#) regarding accessibility requirements for products and services. The report adopted by IMCO did extend the scope in a number of areas, but did not include tourism services.

This can be viewed highly positively, especially given the pressure applied by other Parliamentary committees to include tourism, for example in the opinions voted in the [Transport and Tourism Committee](#) and in the [Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee](#).

It appears that the file is moving in a positive direction for the industry in Council as well.

In the most recent [compromise](#) on the text, on 12th April, there is no suggestion of extending the scope to include tourism services. Member states are working towards adopting a common position, with the Maltese Presidency hoping to achieve this at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council on 16th June.

More extensive Schengen border controls introduced after Council Decision

COUNCIL

In April, more extensive border controls were introduced at the external borders of the Schengen area, with the potential of increased waiting times at customs. This is the implementation of a Council [Regulation](#), adopted on 7th March 2017, which amended the Schengen Border Code.

The amendment requires member states to carry out systematic checks against relevant databases on all persons, including those who enjoy freedom of movement within the EU. Previously, checks have focused only on the photo in individuals' passports and the expiry date. The decision to extend checks was taken as a result of security concerns, with the

Council citing the ‘increase of terrorist threats’ as a major factor. However, security services, including the Belgian Federal Police, have issued warnings that this could produce delays at the external borders of the Schengen area.

Employment/ Labour skills

European Parliament Transport Committee adopts Opinion on Digitising European Industry

On 11th April, the Transport and Tourism Committee adopted its [Opinion](#) on the European Parliament’s own-initiative report on Digitising European Industry, written by [Pavel Telička](#) (Liberals, Czech Republic).

In his Opinion, MEP Telička emphasized the importance of digitising to the tourism sector in particular, arguing that digitisation could address some of the most pressing issues facing the European tourism sector, and help to ‘foster the attractiveness of the tourism sector.’

During the debate on the subject, MEPs stressed the impact of digitisation on employment. For example, Henna Virkunen (Centre-right, Finland) stressed the need to positively embrace the changes to the jobs market resulting from digitisation by investing in training and skills. Meanwhile, Isabel de Monte (Socialists, Italy) praised the report for its emphasis on the tourism sector.

The Industry, Research and Energy Committee adopted its report on the file on 24th April. Moving forward, the file will be voted on by the Plenary session of the European Parliament on 15th May. Although this own-initiative report is legally non-binding, it provides an opportunity for the Parliament to push forward its position.

European Commission launches European Pillar of Social Rights, including Directive on work-life balance

On April 26th, The European Commission [launched](#) its pillar of social rights, which aims to deepen the EU’s commitment to improving working and living conditions in Europe. The pillar encompasses several legislative and non-legislative policy measures. As part of the pillar, the European Commission published a [Proposal](#) for a Directive on the work-life balance of parents and carers.

This Directive puts forward several measures aimed at improving conditions for parents and carers. Specific measures include provisions to give new fathers 10 days’ paid leave and the right to four months of parental leave paid on the equivalent of sick pay, to be taken any time until the child reaches the age of 12. In addition, carers would be allowed five days of paid leave and parents would have the right to request flexible working arrangements.

The Directive will repeal the existing parental leave [Directive](#) of 2010, following arguments that fathers did not take advantage of their rights under this Directive. It is noteworthy that the Commission did not choose to re-open the ongoing debate at EU level on maternity leave, with the Commission withdrawing its previous proposal on this issue in 2015 after failing to secure an agreement between the Parliament and the Council.

European Commission issues its response to European Parliament resolution on work-life balance

EUROPEAN COMMISSION EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On 5th April, the European Commission published its [response](#) to the European Parliament [Resolution](#) on creating labor market conditions favorable for work-life balance. The Commission welcomed the Parliament’s initiative and in particular its focus on issues relating to the work-life balance and gender equality. The Commission states that it fully agrees with the Parliament that EU-wide action is needed to ensure a work-life balance, especially for parents and carers.

In terms of concrete responses to the issue, the Commission emphasizes that a mixture of legislative and non-legislative measures are

required in order to tackle issues in a proportionate manner.

In terms of specifics, the Commission pledges to more regular monitoring and reporting on work-life balance policies, to use EU financial instruments better to promote a work-life balance, and to engage in a structured dialogue with the member states and other key stakeholders to identify best practices to promote a work-life balance.

European Commission publishes Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills in tourism

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

On 21st April, the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) of the European Commission published a call for tender on "Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills in tourism: enhancing the image of careers in the tourism sector." The key priority of this call is to boost employability in the tourism sector.

The specific objectives of the call are to facilitate the upgrading of skills in the sector, promote the awareness of existing tools to enhance employability in the tourism sector, and to improve the popular perception of careers in tourism.

The deadline for submissions to the call for tender is 12th June 2017, and all the documents relating to the call are available [here](#).

Consumer Issues

Geo-blocking – IMCO Committee adopts its Report

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On 25th April, the European Parliament Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) adopted [draft report](#) on addressing geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination by MEP [Roza Thun](#) (EPP, Poland). In the vote, MEPs also voted in favor of all the [compromise amendments](#).

As a positive development for industry, the position adopted by IMCO includes provisions for sellers to offer different prices and terms and conditions over the same territory. This provision is also supported by the European eCommerce and Omni-Channel Trade Association (EMOTA).

Regarding applicable law, the Parliament's position specifies that this will be that of the seller unless it is considered that the seller was actively targeting the consumer's market. If the consumer is the one taking the initiative in approaching the seller, the EU Parliament text

suggests that the seller's rules would apply. This can be viewed relatively positively by the industry.

On the issue of the re-routing the consumer to a different website based on their location, the European Parliament report does require explicit consent from the consumer, but only requires this once.

The vote in the European Parliament Plenary should take place before the summer break. Following interinstitutional negotiations, the file could be concluded by the end of the year under the Estonian EU Presidency.

MEP Questions and Answers

[Commission answers EP question on shorter working hours](#)

In her response to an MEP [question](#) on shorter working hours, Employment Commissioner Marianne Thyssen stressed that Commission research has shown evidence of a link between long working hours and poor health. However, she stated that there was no evidence that the minimum standards set down by the working time [Directive](#) were not sufficient, and that member states were free to put in place stronger protections if they felt this was necessary.

Liberal MEPs [Ivan Jakovčić](#) (Croatia) and [Jozo Radoš](#) (Croatia) had asked whether the Commission intended to take any measures in relation to the damaging effects of long working hours.

[Commission answers EP question on Carers consultation](#)

Employment Commissioner Thyssen responded to the [question](#) by [Marian Harkin](#) (Liberals, Ireland) on the public consultation on the work-life balance for parents and carers. Ms. Thyssen stated that the consultation had engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in order to identify the best legislative and non-legislative measures to promote the work-life balance of parents and carers. She also stated that the consultation was completed in February 2017 and the results should be publicly available shortly.

[MEP question on Reducing restrictions on e-commerce](#)

Conservative [Karol Karski](#) (Poland) tabled a question emphasizing the widespread nature of the issue of geo-blocking, asking the Commission what their anticipated timeline for introducing new geo-blocking measures was, and asking whether the Commission intends to initiate proceedings against unfair e-commerce practices.

[MEP question on Visa reciprocity mechanism with the US](#)

Centre-right [Jiří Pospíšil](#) (Czech Republic) highlighted that a number of countries, including the US, are not adhering to their obligations under visa reciprocity, asked what measures the Commission intends to take in relation to this, and whether the Commission has a study on the impact of these measures.

[MEP question on Removing visa requirement for travel to the USA for the citizens of certain EU Member States](#)

[Claudia Tapardel](#) (Socialists, Romania) asked whether the Commission intended to take measures to encourage the US government to remove visa requirements for all EU member states, and, if the US did not do so, what counter-measures the Commission was willing to take.

[MEP question on Difficulties in transposing the package travel and combined travel services directive](#)

[Birgit Collin-Langen](#) (Centre-right, Germany) highlighted issues in transposing the Package Travel Directive, and asked whether it would be feasible for the Commission to review the Directive before the process of transposition takes place. She additionally asked whether it

was possible for Germany and other member states to jointly refer the Directive back to the Commission for consideration.

[Commission answers EP question on Expected effects of achieving EU-US visa reciprocity](#)

Home Affairs Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos responded to a [question](#) by Socialist [Momchil Nekov](#) (Bulgaria) on the EU-US visa reciprocity by referring to a study presented by the Commission at an European Parliament Plenary session in December 2016. In addition, Mr. Avramopoulos stressed that US law required the US to impose visa requirements if the EU suspended its visa waiver for US citizens.

Events

May

-8th May: High-level [conference](#) on Sustainable tourism and EMAS Awards 2017, European Commission, Valletta.

-11th May: ECTAA and EGFATT workshop on the subject ["Package Travel Directive: Challenges Ahead"](#) in the European Parliament, Brussels

-23-25 May: [Digital Enterprise Show 2017](#), Madrid

-25-26: [Ministerial Conference on Tourism](#), Maltese Presidency

June

-15-16: [Digital Assembly](#), Maltese Presidency, Valetta (Malta)

October

-19: European Tourism Forum, Estonian Presidency and the European Commission, Tallinn (Estonia)

November

-28- 29 November: European Tourism Day, European Commission, Brussels