



**EOS CODE
Launching Conference**

**Monday, 23 January 2012
Hotel Grande Bretagne (Golden Room), Athens**

**Marios Kammenos
General Secretary of HATTA**

**“EOS CODE”
A Code of Practice for sustainable tourism, quality and competitiveness**

Dear Guests,
Dear Partners and Collaborators,

On behalf of HATTA, as the Coordinator of the Project, I welcome you to the Launching Conference of the EOS CODE and thank you cordially for your presence here today!

In an ever changing tourism market, where travel enterprises are constantly being faced with so many new challenges, the ability for a **swift adaptation to new circumstances** seems to be the only way for these enterprises to ensure their future existence.

The **members** of the five Associations that are Partners in the EOS CODE Project are mainly **small and micro enterprises**: tour operators, travel agencies or both.

The Project is basically designed for small and micro travel enterprises, which are the vast majority in all European countries. In fact, however, it concerns all travel enterprises, regardless of their size, and its principles and aims should be adopted, enforced and pursued by every entity in the tourism business.

In the terms “tour operators” and “travel agencies” are included outgoing and incoming travel agencies, as well as tour operators in outgoing tourism and destination management companies.

Package travel constitutes a significant part of the work of these enterprises. It is a highly and uniformly regulated field of operations, with common rules for all European countries, which impose the same level of minimum requirements to all players involved concerning quality of services and consumer protection.

In order to survive in this very competitive and demanding market, characterized by an increasing degree of concentration and by the development of the Internet, tour operators and travel agencies have to always strive to offer services with an added value: services of higher **quality**, with a more individualized and personal touch. They also have to successfully respond to the new and increasing need of tourism for **sustainability** and for the **protection of the environment**.

However, because of their size, respective structure and characteristics, the members of this target group do not always dispose of the necessary information on how to best operate in order to increase consumer satisfaction, thus enhancing their

competitiveness, nor do they have easy access to new practices with regard to sustainability, which can bring them closer to satisfying the new demands of the market.

As a two-legged tool, addressing at once **competitiveness and sustainability**, EOS CODE, which we are offering to our members today, can be a useful and inexpensive guide to help them do exactly that: Increase the quality of their services, while getting to know and embracing the principles of sustainability, and thus enhance their competitiveness in the challenging actual tourism market.

The needs and constraints of this specific group of travel enterprises being common in most European countries, EOS CODE can be of assistance to its signatories throughout Europe. This is also the aspiration of its creators: After its implementation in the five countries of the Partners that have participated in its creation, to open it for use in the other European countries as well.

Our Partner ECTAA, members of which are all our Associations, after having helped immensely in the creation process, will have a major role to play in the promotion of EOS CODE to the rest of its members.

In any case, EOS CODE is and will remain a **voluntary tool**, created to respond to specific needs that arose from the operation of the market. Tour operators and travel agencies are encouraged to try it out, because it really can help them solve existing competitiveness issues of their enterprises, while at the same time giving something back to the environment and to their destinations. However, the eventual success of the Code can only depend on the actual willingness of the interested parties to embrace its principles and to diligently implement them. And this willingness could never be forced!

EOS CODE has been designed to be used mainly in package travel.

Its implementation will affect not only the **tour operators and travel agencies** who will adopt it, and who are the main target group of the Project, but also -through their service **suppliers**, as well as the **consumers**. These three factors are the indivisible links of the same chain, and only their close collaboration and the commitment of all three to the principles of sustainability can produce tangible positive results in this sensitive field.

EOS CODE provides, on one hand, **standards** and **practices** for the increase of quality in all services provided by the tour operators and travel agencies who implement it, thus aiming to contribute to the enhancement of the competitiveness of its signatories. On the other hand, it addresses the **sustainable character of all elements of package travel**, namely:

- accommodation (for example: existence of a recognized sustainability label, adoption of environment-friendly policies in all the aspects of the accommodation units' operations, etc.),
- transportation (for example: policies on emissions, access for disabled persons, etc.), and
- other services (for example: excursion to a monument or site protected by national or international legislation, visit of a protected natural area possibly with guidance by a person knowledgeable in environmental issues, etc.).

The EOS CODE also includes **best practices**, for the optimal implementation of sustainability in travel packages and in tourism in general.

Tour operators and travel agencies, when complying with the competitiveness and sustainability requirements of the Code, will be certain to increase their added value, thus reinforcing their position in the market.

As for the indirect target groups of EOS CODE, **service suppliers**, who provide services typically included in travel package (e.g. transporters, accommodation providers, car rental services, restaurants etc.), can be urged by tour operators and travel agencies to adopt suitable quality and sustainability standards through the contracting procedure, but also through promotion and information. The signatories of the Code will learn to assess these enterprises' compliance to the desired standards before including them in their packages or before collaborating with them on behalf of an individual customer. Moreover, these suppliers are often small and micro enterprises themselves and therefore they are facing the same constraints of lack of information, know-how and means as tour operators and travel agencies. This is why they have also to be approached, mainly through promotion and publicity, and become aware of the contents of the Code, in order to adapt their services to its requirements, thus enhancing their chances of collaboration with the participating tour operators and travel agencies and of contributing to sustainability in tourism.

The important improvement in the whole tourism chain, which will arise from these efforts, will undoubtedly also benefit **consumers** (the second indirect target group of EOS CODE), who already become more and more aware and demanding as far as quality of services and managing of the environment in their holiday destinations are concerned. The implementation of the practices included in the **EOS CODE** by the above mentioned tourist enterprises will thus benefit consumers in a significant way. Moreover, the tourists themselves often become disappointed with the actual situation they face in their destinations, but they don't always realise the ways in which they too can contribute to the amelioration of the situation. Tour operators and travel agents have an important role to play there too and EOS CODE can teach them about it.

The Partners

HATTA had the initial idea for the creation of this Code of Practice on environment oriented sustainability and a strong group of Partners was gathered together for its realisation. It consists of:

Two research Partners:

- the University of Padova in Italy and
- the Research Institute for Tourism (ITEP) in Greece,

the

- European Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (ECTAA), based in Belgium, and

five national Associations of tour operators and travel agents:

- HATTA in Greece, who was also the Project Coordinator,
- ABTTA in Bulgaria,
- FIAVET in Italy,
- PIT in Poland, and
- UHPA in Croatia.

Contents of the Code

The EOS CODE consists of two elements: .

(1) The first element of EOS CODE is a list of **nine (9) Principles** that tour operators and travel agencies will have to accept and abide by, in order to be able to subscribe to the Code and implement it.

These Principles, essential for the provision of sustainable and high quality tourism products and services, are:

- Responsible operation and management of the business. [The travel enterprise has to act in a responsible way with regard to all the activities inside the office, such as energy saving, waste management, paper management and good labour conditions.]
- Monitoring of the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of the business and preparation, implementation and reviewing of an annual action plan on sustainable tourism. [The goals of the enterprise, with regard to sustainability, have to be set and followed with predefined steps of actions. Results have to be constantly monitored, for the management of the company to always be aware of the progress of the effort.]
- Education and training of the employees on environmental and cultural values in tourism, travel options and suppliers' implementing programs that protect and sustain the environment. [A successful effort towards sustainability cannot be made without the active participation and support of the business personnel, which has to be fully informed, trained and motivated.]
- Information and awareness-raising among customers on responsible and sustainable behaviors. [Tour operators have an important role in motivating their customers towards more sustainable decisions and behaviour. They can inform and motivate clients towards booking sustainable accommodations and transport means and they can also provide destination or activity specific codes of conduct, to raise awareness among their customers.]
- Encouragement and participation in activities that will support local economy and enhance local employment. [Tour operators can influence local authorities and business associations, individually or collectively, towards a more responsible and long term perspective in developing the destination.]
- Use of tourism marketing to raise awareness on environmental, social and cultural diversity and richness. [Advertising is respect for nature and culture in the destinations. It is essential that in marketing communication a correct picture of the destinations is provided, since it enables consumers to make the right choice that matches with their needs and interests.]
- Taking care to constantly improve the product and the quality of services through implementation of business practices in Quality Management. [The first and overriding feature of a Quality Management System is the company's focus on its customers. Quality is defined as meeting or exceeding customers' expectations.]
- Appointment of a person within the enterprise that will be responsible for projects and activities related to sustainability in tourism. [Although the effort of the company towards sustainability is a collective one, one person has to be appointed to coordinate all the required activities, in order to ensure their effectiveness.]

- Sharing the best practices with other signatories of the Code. [This is also an obligation of the signatories of the Code, to share their own best practices in the EOS CODE website for the benefit of all the others.]

(2) The second element of the EOS CODE is a **Handbook of Best** sustainable business **Practices**, to which tour operators and travel agencies will have access via the EOS CODE website.

The Handbook contains Best Practices that have already been implemented and have proven their effectiveness in 6 different business areas:

- **Internal management** (taking into account sustainability principles in the management of human resources, office supplies and production of printed materials);
- **Product development and management** (selecting holiday package components that minimise environmental, economic and social impacts);
- **Contracting with suppliers** (integrating sustainability principles into the selection criteria and service agreements of suppliers);
- **Customer relations** (guaranteeing privacy, health and safety standards, and providing customers with information on responsible behaviour and sustainability issues at their destinations);
- **Relations with destinations** (supporting destination stakeholders' efforts to address sustainability issues and proactively contributing to conservation and development projects)
- **Quality management** (allowing managers/leaders to understand the cause and effect relationship between what their organisation does and the results it achieves).

The Best Practices that are already available in the Handbook have been collected by the five Associations-Partners in the Project, from some of their members who already include elements of sustainability in their business and products, even without the more formal “guidance” of a code of practice or a sustainability initiative or programme.

This Handbook will be updated regularly with the new best practices that the EOS CODE signatories themselves will have implemented while using the Code. Thus, the new signatories will have the chance to learn from already existing Best Practices and to pick up for implementation the one or ones that better suit their business. Or they can be inspired by or based on what has already been implemented with success by other enterprises to create a completely new project.

The EOS CODE Website

The EOS CODE Website (www.eoscode.eu) will be the main point of contact of the tour operators and travel agencies with the Code.

It contains parts that are open for everyone to view and parts (the ones that have to do with the implementation of the Code) that are reserved only to registered users.

In the “closed” parts are included the Handbook of Best Practices, the Training, the Training Material and the self-assessing test.

The Website still needs some fine-tuning that will be completed by the end of the month. New content will continue to be uploaded on the Website until everything is in place. New content will also be uploaded every time there is a new signatory, namely his profile, logo and contact details, and every time there is a new Best Practice by a signatory to be shared with the rest.

Interesting and useful Training Material, as well as the results of the Research in the process of creating the Code, will also be available to the tour operators and travel agencies who will implement it.

Frequently Asked Questions will be answered in the relative part of the Website, news from the implementation of EOS CODE will be posted as they become available and the whole will be completed with short presentations of the 8 Partners that created EOS CODE.

The EOS CODE website has been created in the English language. Its most important parts, however, will also be available in other languages. Initially they will be translated in the five languages of the Project Partners: Bulgarian, Croatian, Greek, Italian and Polish. When EOS CODE becomes available for use to other European countries as well, a translation to the languages of these countries will also be possible.

How to participate

As mentioned earlier, the implementation of the EOS CODE is voluntary.

The interested tour operators and travel agencies can visit the EOS CODE website and fill-in the registration form. Before doing so, the 9 Principles of the Code will be presented to them. Filling-in the registration form means acceptance of the Principles. The registration form of each candidate signatory of the Code will be sent to the competent Association of their respective countries for approval. Once approved, the new member will be given a username and a password (or it will be allowed to keep the ones already selected), so that it can log-in in the website as a registered user and have full access to all its contents.

A quick and easy training in the EOS CODE website will guide the new signatories through the necessary steps for the implementation of the Code. After completing it and passing the self assessment test, they can begin to implement the EOS CODE in parts or all of their business areas, as stated in the annual action plan that they will prepare.

As stated previously, during the first operational stages of the EOS CODE, only tour operators and travel agencies members of the five Associations of the member states participating in the EOS CODE Project can apply as signatories of the Code. Subsequently, the Code will be open for all tour operators and travel agencies in all member states.

Questions

For a number of possible questions concerning the EOS CODE, the signatories will be able to consult the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the Project's website.

If a specific question is not answered there, they can write (in English) to the emails: info@eoscode.eu or support@eoscode.eu.

In case that they need assistance or guidance in their own language, they can always contact the competent Association in their respective countries, either via the contact form available on the EOS CODE website or in their telephone numbers, faxes and emails.

Benefits for the signatories

The **direct benefits** for the signatories of the Code will be to witness the satisfaction of their customers as a result of the provision of better and more personal services **and**

of their efforts to embrace the principles of sustainability and to see the competitiveness of their enterprise increase because of it, with all the obvious advantages that this will bring to their position in the tourism market.

Moreover, all the enterprises implementing the EOS CODE will be presented, with a short profile, their logo and their contact details, in the Project's website. This will constitute an **indirect benefit**, an additional publicity that will make them known and recognisable, not only to clients in their own country, but also in other European Member States.

The participating enterprises will also be able to use the logo of the EOS CODE to indicate their commitment to and application of sustainable business practices. The logo will ensure a visible and immediate recognition of sustainability and quality that clients will easily get to know.

For more information thereon, please refer to www.eoscode.eu or contact one of the five Associations participating in the project.

Synergy with TRAVELIFE

Some time before the completion of the EOS CODE Project, a happy conjunction brought its creators together with ECEAT, the entity responsible for TRAVELIFE, the well established and already widespread in many European countries initiative for sustainability in tourism.

The common principles that the two Projects share and their complementary nature led to a decision for their close collaboration in the future, for the benefit of their mutual subscribers.

EOS CODE can be considered as an initial step in sustainability. It is friendly and easy to implement, so it will be used as the first step for the subsequent implementation of the more formal TRAVELIFE. The tour operators and travel agencies that will implement EOS CODE will benefit of an easy access to TRAVELIFE.

This synergy made necessary some redesign and adapting of the Training of the EOS CODE, but we are certain that the candidates interested to implement it will agree that it was worth the while.

In Greece, HATTA is the Association responsible for promoting this synergy to the tour operators and travel agencies of the country and for assisting them, in close collaboration with ECEAT, once they subscribe to become users of the two Programmes.

Mr. Naut Kusters, the Director of ECEAT, who is with us today, will inform you later more comprehensively on the initiative of TRAVELIFE and on its intended synergy with EOS CODE.

The actual circumstances in the economy of Europe, as well as of the entire world, are certainly not favorable for our sector. Solving everyday problems necessarily comes first in the minds and the efforts of most tourism professionals, leaving somehow behind thoughts for new possibilities in their work.

However, it is also true that a new opportunity could arise from this serious difficulty! And in order to embrace it with success, tour operators and travel agencies need to change some things in the way they are operating, in order to become more competitive and be able to secure a better place for themselves in the future tourism world.

EOS CODE is giving them the possibility to do so, in a non-expensive and easy way. Our hope is that it will be embraced by as many tour operators and travel agencies as possible and that it will prove a really useful and practical tool for them.

HATTA, as the Coordinator of the EOS CODE Project, extends its heartfelt **thanks** to the **European Commission**, for the excellent collaboration with regard to the Project and for the presence of its representative here today, as well as to the representative of the **European initiative for sustainability “TRAVELIFE”** for his presence in the Conference and for the future synergy of “TRAVELIFE” with EOS CODE.

Please allow me to also thank **all our Partners and each one of their staff members** for their hard work and dedication, namely:

- the University of Padova,
- the Research Institute for Tourism (ITEP),
- the Association of Bulgarian Tour Operators and Travel Agents (ABTTA),
- the Italian Federation Association of Travel and Tourism Enterprises (FIAVET),
- the Polish Chamber of Tourism (PIT),
- the Association of Croatian Travel Agencies (UHPA), and especially
- the European Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (ECTAA), for its unlimited support and guidance.

Finally, I thank the Project Manager and the other staff members of the Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies (HATTA), the Coordinator of the Project, and a special thanks is due to our Director, Ms. Anna Anyfanti, who had the initial idea for the creation of EOS CODE and worked tirelessly for its realisation.

We wish our common creation a long and successful sustainable life, for the benefit of our members and of tourism in our respective countries and in Europe in general.

I thank you all for your attention!