

PRESS RELEASE

Athens, 16 January 2006

**European Commission supports formation of
'European Network for Accessible Tourism'**

The European Commission is supporting an international public-private partnership to establish a new membership organisation for the European tourism sector: the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), focusing on better accessibility for disabled customers and others who need the safety and convenience of comfortable, well-managed environments and services.

The Network aims to build bridges between travel and tourism businesses operating in Europe, specialist advisors, policy-makers, researchers, tourism education institutions, consumer organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations, all of whom share the goal of creating more accessible destinations and offers for tourists.

"Numerous studies have shown that disabled people are excluded from travelling and enjoying a holiday - at home or abroad - by a lack of suitable facilities. Economic barriers are not the biggest factor keeping people at home, and the market potential is enormous, when you consider that there are 50 million disabled people and their families in Europe. Added to this, destinations with good physical access and services are a boon to hundreds of millions of older travellers who may have health and mobility problems associated with ageing. As populations both in Europe and globally are ageing rapidly, it is only common sense to make tourism accessible for all -

says Ivor Ambrose, Coordinator of the partnership behind ENAT.

Headed by the Athens-based IT services company, EWORX S.A., the co-founders and partners of ENAT include three leaders in the European tourism sector: the Greek Ministry of Tourism, VisitBritain (the British Tourism Authority), and Tourism for All (Sweden). The consumer and NGO sector is strongly represented by Fundación ONCE (Spain), as well as Disability NOW (Greece), and two Belgian centres of expertise on accessibility: a Flemish Centre for Accessibility, (Toegankelijkheidsbureau vzw) and ANLH, Brussels.

ENAT will also pay special attention to the issue of employment of disabled people in the tourism sector, and here the Work Research Centre, Dublin, brings its expertise to the network, coordinating sector-specific information and providing evaluation services.

“By forming ENAT, we hope to extend the substantial work being done in countries and regions such as Britain and Flanders where, for example, accessibility information schemes for tourist accommodation are already in place.”

“Furthermore, national and European legislation is increasingly emphasising equal rights for all consumers, so we are convinced that this is the right time to bring the tourism industry together to take advantage of existing know-how and improve the quality of access in tourism.” – Ambrose adds.

In the coming two years, ENAT will establish contacts with businesses and other organisations in all the Member States of the European Union and other European countries, leading to a Network that will enable providers, consumer representatives and specialists to share experiences and promote better policies and practices in accessible tourism. The Network is also organising a number of events where Members and interested parties can meet, exchange ideas and plan further initiatives.

ENAT will also undertake studies to benchmark the progress that is being made in the tourism sector towards improving the accessibility of hotels and destinations, showing how disabled and elderly tourists are being better served by the industry.










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Further information about ENAT can be obtained from the Project Coordinator at this address: enat@eworx.gr

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See next page for Partner details

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Partners			
Fundación ONCE	Spain		www.fundaciononce.es
Toegankelijkheidsbureau VZW.	Belgium		www.toegankelijkheidsbureau.be
VisitBritain	UK		www.visitbritain.org
Turism för Alla	Sweden		www.turismforalla.se
Work Research Centre	Ireland		www.wrc-research.ie
Hellenic Ministry of Tourism	Greece		www.mintour.gr
Assoc. Nat. pour le Logement des Personnes Handicapées	Belgium		www.anlh.be
Disability Now	Greece		www.disabled.gr