

Tourism: Now the regions get to have their say

Salzburg: The biggest European conference on the theme of “Regions and Tourism” was held on Monday in Schloss Gwandhaus. The ex-regional leader and chairman of the board of directors of the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE), **Dr. Franz Schausberger**, was able to greet 150 participants from 27 states and more than 40 European regions to the event.

Schausberger levelled criticism at the fact that there was only a disappointingly small space left for the cities and the regions in the new tourism strategy of the EU. He highlighted the significance of the touristic-political activities of those cities and regions in terms of the small and medium sizes enterprises. **Franci Rokavec**, state secretary for local autonomous administration and regional policy, underlined the large potential of the economic branch of tourism in Slovenia. In the last few years, a great deal has been invested in quantity. Now, it is a matter of increasing quality. The new construction of 4- and 5 star hotels has been accelerated.

The Polish state secretary **Tomasz Wilczak** outlined the current status quo in Poland concerning the field of tourism. With 23 national parks and reserves, as well as 13 world heritage sites, tourism is an important part of the economy. Particular attention has been paid to the positioning of niche products: so, in Cracow, for example, special Jewish culture or industry tourism on the Elbe canal is being offered.

Large sleeping tourism potential has been identified in Central and Eastern Europe by the chairman of the Bulgarian Agency for Tourism, the National Tourism Information Centre, **Mario Al-Jebouri**. In Bulgaria, the share of the GDP taken up by tourism in 2005 amounted to 13 percent. The season is very short and is mainly concentrated on the Black Sea Coast and the ski resorts.

Esencan Terzibasoglu of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) judged the prospects for Europe in 2006 in the field of tourism to be very positive. In the opinion of the expert, China and Russia are on the rise and must therefore be calculated into all marketing plans.

Others who spoke included **Stefan Eder**, partner of the law firm DLA Weiss-Tessbach, Francesco Ianiello, head of the department for tourism in the General Directorate for Enterprise and Industry at the EU Commission in Brussels, head of the tourism section **Elisabeth Udolf-Strobl**, as well as **Hans-Harald Jahn**, head of department for Tourism at the EIB.

Alexander Pfeffer.