

"European Parliament Roundtable: What next for tourism accommodation safety in the EU?"

Hosted by MEP Linda McAvan and ABTA - The Travel Association.

ANEC Secretary-General's speech

Wednesday 18 November 2015 - European Parliament, Brussels

Hello everyone and thank you to Linda for inviting me to speak to you this afternoon on behalf of ANEC, the European consumer voice in standardisation.

Of course, millions of people use tourist accommodation in Europe each year. For most - if not nearly all - their stays will have been uneventful. As a result, their perception might well be that all was fine with their accommodation. That they were satisfied with its safety. Indeed, none of them may have ever experienced a problem with the safety of their tourist accommodation. Just as HOTREC claim in their letter.

But "nearly all" is not all.

The unlucky ones will have experienced a problem. Perhaps a fire. And they may have found that the safety precautions in the accommodation did not match their expectations. Perhaps there were few or no fire extinguishers. Perhaps fire exits were blocked or locked. Perhaps the staff were not trained in safety procedures.

The unluckiest will have paid for their bad luck with their lives.

Others may have found that the appliances in their accommodation were badly installed or poorly maintained. In the case of a gas appliance, as we know, incorrect installation, maintenance or operation can lead - and does lead - to carbon monoxide poisoning and death. We all know the terrible case of the Shepherd children. But they have not been the only victims. Still many more people are believed to fall ill from carbon monoxide poisoning while using tourist accommodation, but the numbers are not known as such incidents are often not recorded.

It is mainly for these reasons that ANEC has been contributing to the debate on the safety of tourism accommodation for over 10 years now. Of course, we appreciate that, in that time, in the area of fire safety, some trade associations have come forward with codes of practice for their members. Unfortunately, these codes are invariably voluntary. And, as with any self-regulation, the good guys are always likely to comply, while the bad guys rarely do. As Linda said, "been there, done that".

It is the reason why only a single, European regulation on the safety of tourist accommodation can be appropriate, supported by EFFECTIVE enforcement at the national level, with criminal sanctions for those who break the law.

Indeed, when it comes to product or service legislation, it is enforcement that is the key and yet is the area that is so often so very sadly lacking. In the case of the very recent fire in Bucharest - where more than 30 people died as a blaze tore through a nightclub, as customers rushed towards a single exit - the owners have admitted that they did not respect safety legislation or standards. Legislation alone is not enough.

All consumers should be entitled to benefit from a minimum standard of safety throughout Europe, with risk assessment ensuring measures are proportionate and appropriate. Hence our disappointment at the conclusion the Commission drew from its Green Paper of last year that there is insufficient evidence for further consideration of consumer protection. The Commission says no. Some in Council say no. If Europe is to be the world's number one tourist destination, they cannot be serious.

We believe the Parliament has shown far more foresight in its Resolution on the De Monte Report and the clear support that resolution gives for minimum standards for tourism safety in the EU, particularly in ensuring safety from fire and carbon monoxide poisoning in tourist accommodation. We should at least find a solution to these two killers. Hence my message today that ANEC stands ready to help support Parliamentarians in these efforts.

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