

## **SETE's position on the Government Employment Council**

It is now widely accepted that it is essential to maintain fiscal stability to ensure the viability of Greece's economic and social recovery. SETE has publicly approved the coalition government because it is carrying out a very difficult task under extreme conditions and much pressure. However, achieving this depends on implementing a development plan along the lines recently sketched by the Prime Minister, to promote dynamic, outward-looking sectors of the economy, among which the wider tourism sector holds a dominant position. The critical thing over the next few years is not merely to ensure that growth indexes rise but also to tackle the explosive rise in unemployment, especially among young people. It has been widely accepted that the tourism sector is not merely the basic pillar supporting the Greek economy and employment at present, but will also be the most critical sector for ensuring sustainable development over the years to come.

All relevant studies show that the first priority that investments focus on must be the wider tourism sector. That is because it holds out the greatest prospects for growth and for creating new, sustainable jobs. The new National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) makes the importance of tourism particularly clear. It is essential to stress that data for the current year have revealed that the quantitative targets which we forecast we would achieve in 2-3 years from now are, it seems, being achieved today. A continuation of this trend in the sector over the years to come will mean that the targets we had set for the end of the decade (22 to 24 million arrivals, direct and indirect revenues of € 41-44 billion and 350,000 new jobs by 2021) could quite feasibly be achieved much earlier, with all that entails for the economy, for employment and for a sustainable reduction in unemployment in particular. Improved tourism training and education is a critical factor in achieving those targets. We need to improve training based on international standards and quality apprenticeship schemes that will create opportunities for young people to acquire experience and find jobs.<sup>2</sup> The Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) is the only Social Partner which has prepared and presented a comprehensive 10-year strategic plan to develop the tourism sector in Greece. That plan sets out specific targets that can be achieved by creating a robust portfolio of 6 main products: sun & beach tourism; city breaks, especially for Athens and Thessaloniki; yachting tourism; medical tourism; conference (MICE) tourism; and cultural / religious tourism, as well as a series of complementary specialised products.

A specialised plan has been developed for each of the main products, which includes a suitable strategy addressing issues such as the market, clientele, infrastructure development and marketing. Over the months to come, the SETE Institute will work diligently on strategic workforce planning which will be an exceptionally useful tool in devising employment and

vocational training courses for the years to come. Essential conditions to make the next programming period as effective as possible are developing and establishing systems and running specialised courses which (i) address emerging needs in the specific fields of the tourism industry in a comprehensive manner and (ii) lead to professional qualifications based on internationally recognised quality systems. With that in mind, the critical steps are to develop and put in place systems and mechanisms: (a) to improve the effectiveness and added value of on-the-job, apprenticeship and training schemes, (b) to ensure the quality of vocational training and certification of professional qualifications based on the most efficient international models, (c) to identify the needs of tourism businesses and shortcomings/mismatches in the field of skills and professional qualifications. Improving the tourism product will lead to higher demand for more skilled workers, and will thus require a higher level of skills and better professional qualifications.

A critical aspect of our national strategy must be to improve quality management and assurance systems for infrastructure, services and, above all, human resources. Strategic planning and effective implementation of integrated growth and workforce adaption plans<sup>3</sup> means we have to put systems in place to monitor changes in the market overall as well as the various sectors of the market, local economies and professions, to identify current weaknesses early on and to systematically diagnose future skills shortages and shortcomings with professional qualifications. This information needs to be fed into a modern mechanism that will allow us to develop training courses and certify professional qualifications with the assistance of accredited national and international private-sector bodies. In this context, we believe it is extremely important to be able to reliably identify skills shortages and the need for different professional qualifications early on so we can offer quality professional training for staff in the sector, provide professional development support services to businesspeople in the wider tourism sector and, in particular, certify qualifications and services based on recognised, internationally accepted procedures. Our strategic HR objective is to ensure that employees and professionals in the sector gain certified qualifications based on international standards and specifications.

The Confederation can also play a decisive role in this sector by developing mechanisms to disseminate, transfer and roll out know-how among the workforce and businesses in the areas it represents. It can do this in particular by providing professional development support services to businesspeople in the wider tourism sector by utilising knowledge incubators, B2B, or mentoring / coaching / counselling services, among other things. Successful implementation of the plan means we need to develop comprehensive schemes to improve quality and help the workforce adapt, coupled with measures and actions specifically tailored to each category. Improving quality in the HR sector means that the individual education and vocational training measures taken must lead to skills and professional qualifications acquired by employees that are certified based on internationally recognised and accepted standards and procedures, irrespective of whether the individual measures relate to the unemployed, employees or professionals in the

sector. Internationally accepted certification procedures for professional qualifications are the only appropriate, effective way of making education and training systems more relevant to the labour market, and of helping employees, businesses<sup>4</sup> and businessmen adapt to the changes that implementing our strategy will entail. Development plans must be comprehensive, and allow for all necessary tools and measures to be combined to suit the specialised needs of each category of product and the particular requirements of the relevant labour market. These measures include professional on-the-job training, work experience, and apprenticeships based on quality standards and training courses that lead to internationally recognised professional qualifications.

We also believe that the State must invest in the endeavour to make citizens more aware about the importance of tourism, particularly in the first grades of the normal education system, by utilising cutting-edge technologies and web tools. The critical role of the social partners in bolstering and improving the preparation, planning, drafting, implementation and monitoring of programmes is specifically and clearly highlighted in all programming and regulatory documents the European Commission has issued relating to the new NSRF. SETE, which represents a sector accounting for almost 20% of Greece's GDP and private-sector jobs, is a new type of Social Partner. In the new programming period, we aim not simply to participate, but to maximise our role in national development planning and in implementation of those plans in accordance with European guidelines. We can contribute by upgrading business skills and extending the Confederation's reach, to ensure that SETE plays a substantive role in formulating public policies and improving the effectiveness of measures adopted at national, regional and sectoral level so that businesses and employees in the sectors it represents benefit. We firmly believe that to achieve the shared goal of creating more jobs it is essential that the partnership developed via the voucher scheme must continue and must be strengthened. This is fully in line with the requirements of the European Social Fund Regulations, which attach particular importance to and place great emphasis on the involvement of the social partners in planning and implementing priorities and interventions, especially when it comes to employment and training targets.

The recent 5th evaluation demonstrated that young people participating in the scheme were very satisfied with it. Businesses in the sector also embraced the scheme, which was well received among beneficiaries. The retention rate for beneficiaries with businesses in the scheme also appears to be satisfactory. Improvements to certain aspects of the new scheme have convinced us that it will be even more effective in the future, especially for young participants. We also believe that an important part of the training courses designed to improve young peoples' skills (particularly in areas of specialisation that are critical to cutting-edge professions in the Greek economy) must also specifically relate to the tourism sector and lead to certified professional qualifications based on internationally recognised quality standards. SETE and the General Confederation of Greek Workers are already working in partnership to develop optional

standards and best practices for skills and internationally recognised professional qualifications in order to ensure that vocational training measures for employees, the unemployed and businesses are as effective as possible. We propose that these measures be assigned to SETE in partnership with the General Confederation of Greek Workers and that they should be aimed at young people in the tourism sector who become seasonally unemployed. It is well known that (a) changes in unemployment subsidisation terms and conditions have significantly reduced the number of people entitled to benefits in this category, and (b) involving the seasonally unemployed who are entitled to unemployment benefit in vocational training courses will ensure significant savings of valuable national resources. The specialised job retention and promotion schemes run by the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) in the period 2010-2012 should also be repeated next year. Those schemes resulted in around 12,000 jobs being retained and also increased seasonal employment in the tourism sector by around 80,000. This is essential if one takes into account that changes over recent years in the unemployment benefits for the seasonally unemployed have led to a rapid reduction in the number of people entitled to benefits. Critical priorities for both SETE and the Greek State include (i) maximising the added value of these schemes to ensure that the greatest number of unemployed people find jobs in the labour market and (ii) ensuring that workers can adapt to the changes occurring by upgrading their skill sets. A key condition is that these schemes reflect the actual needs of the unemployed, workers<sup>6</sup> and businesses in the tourism sector.

SETE and other Social Partners can and must plan a new, more active, more substantive role as links between the State, businesses and Greece's workforce. With that in mind, we believe that the critical issues which must be addressed immediately are:

- The active involvement of the Social Partners in planning and, above all in implementing job promotion schemes and vocational training courses for the unemployed and workers, needs to be statutorily enshrined.
- Systems, mechanisms and standards need to be put in place to ensure the quality of vocational training and the certification of professional qualifications based on the most efficient international models.
- A national system for reliably identifying skills shortages and professional qualifications which are needed, early on has to be developed and put in place. SETE must be actively involved in this in the tourism sector.
- Apprenticeship schemes and work experience schemes need to be of better quality and implemented in a better way to ensure the maximum number of young people are able to find jobs.
- Available resources from the new NSRF need to be allocated in advance to sectors of the economy and programmes must be implemented via partnerships between the State and the Social Partners.

We believe that adopting these proposals will lead not just to improved cooperation, but to tangible results in the battle against unemployment, and youth unemployment in particular.