

increased by 32.9%. In 2016, however, there was a downturn of 8.8%, possibly because of 2015/6 security incidents. In 2017, the situation started to recover, reaching almost 2.3 million visas issued.<sup>2</sup>

Tourism is one of the few sectors where the EU has a trade surplus with China (around EUR 4 billion). In 2016 the value of EU travel services exported to China was close to EUR 7 billion, against nearly EUR 3 billion imported from China (i.e. what EU residents spent on trips in China)<sup>3</sup>.

However, the EU tourism industry is losing competitiveness on the Chinese markets compared to its Western competitors (i.e. USA, Australia and the UK after Brexit). The loss of competitiveness is partially linked to (1) visa facilitation granted to Chinese by our main Western competitors (USA, Australia, Russia); (2) their targeted awareness raising campaigns (i.e. 2012-3 Russia-China Tourism year, 2016 US-China Tourism year & 2017 Australia-China tourism year; and (3) security concerns linked with recurring incidents in Europe in 2015-16.

The 2018 EU-China Tourism Year (ECTY) is one of the concrete contributions of the Union aimed at boosting European competitiveness and increase the number of travellers off peak and off-season from key third markets such as China<sup>4</sup>. On that occasion the EU funded 9 EU-China Business-to-Business matchmaking meetings, the gathering and production of educational materials<sup>5</sup>. It also invited and helped ETC / Visit Europe to set up a 'Joint Promotion Platform' aimed at promoting Europe as a single tourism destination. This Public Private Partnership is targeting China, cofinancing and coordinating campaigns, initiatives and events during 2018.<sup>6</sup>

#### **1.4.1.2 Objective of the initiative**

This call for tender is launched in the framework of the 2018 Preparatory Action "World bridge tourism" voted by the European Parliament. Its aim is to build on the work done for the EU-China Tourism Year by funding additional B2B (Business-to-Business) matchmaking events and developing training materials to help the sector preparing for Chinese travellers.

The European Parliament, in its 2015 own initiative report on tourism, requested the Commission to increase the budget for promotion and help the tourism sector to enhance its competitiveness. It also asked in 2015 the Commission to develop a Pilot Project called "World bridge tourism" whose aim was to attract more Chinese tourists in Europe, notably on the basis of transnational packages

The general objectives of this tender are to:

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, "Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States" [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy_en).

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, "Tourism in focus – China Tourism 2018" <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/vto/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://ecty2018.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.eutravelpartnerships.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://ecty2018.org/>.