

HOTREC¹ position on European and international classification

Adopted by the HOTREC General Assembly in Barcelona, 6 November 2009

Classification systems exist at national and regional level in most European Union Member States. A great number of our associations have contributed to the development of such systems, either on their own initiative or in collaboration with public authorities. These systems are widely used and widely known.

The Directive on services in the internal market², adopted in 2006, calls for more transparency in relation to classification. Consumers refer to classification as an important help for choosing a hotel: it is therefore important that information on the meaning of the classification in the different countries be easily available to them.

HOTREC member associations, therefore, on their own initiative, endeavoured to increase the accessibility to information on their various classification systems. Most associations have set up a website/webpage for this purpose, providing such information in English, in their own language and sometimes in others, as well. The website established by HOTREC, www.hotelstars.org, connects all these sites.

Hotel review and booking sites, as well as tour operators and travel agents, should provide information about the official star classification of establishments. If they use their own rating scheme alongside, they should specify so.

As far as approximation or harmonisation of the existing systems is concerned, HOTREC member associations will continue to oppose any attempt by the public authorities or the standardisation bodies at European or international level to impose a European-wide or world-wide classification system.

¹ HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. It counts 1.6 million businesses, with 92% of them being micro enterprises employing less than 10 people. The micro and small enterprises (having less than 50 employees) in the hospitality industry representing 99% of businesses make up some 62% of value added. The industry provides some 9 million jobs in the EU alone. HOTREC brings together 40 National Associations representing the interest of the industry in 25 different European countries.

² Directive 2006/123/EC

Differences in culture and geographical situations explain the currently remaining differences between the criteria and methodology of the classification systems in the European countries. When the systems were developed, by whom (industry or public authorities or both) and whether they are made mandatory by law, also add major elements to the diversity.

Nonetheless, HOTREC member associations have undertaken to bring the classification systems closer together, using a bottom-up approach, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

The 15 recommendations for the setting-up of and/or review of national/regional hotel classification systems, adopted by the HOTREC members in 2005, were widely followed. First cross-border harmonisation efforts are starting to bear their fruits. The Nordic-Baltic Classification system and a Central European system are already well-advanced in defining common classification criteria for the hotel establishments of their countries and they work together on further harmonisation.

Classification systems are getting closer and closer to one another, without any brutal disruption of the existing schemes, which would be to the detriment of the consumers as well as of the industry.

Continuing on this well-paved road, in 2009, HOTREC reviewed its recommendations: some were refined and new were added.

HOTREC and its member associations will inform the public authorities and the standardisation bodies at national, European and international level of this position and of their work in relation to classification.

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Annex: “21 Principles for the setting-up of and/or the review of national/regional hotel classification systems in Europe”

Classification of hotels in Europe

21 HOTREC principles for the setting-up and/or review of national/regional hotel classification systems in Europe

2009

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1. Classification systems must ensure that **accurate information** is provided to the guests;
2. Classification systems should display their criteria (summary and full list) online to the guests via www.hotelstars.org at least in English and their national language;
3. Information about the star category of each individual hotel as well as the classification system on which this rating is based should be made **transparent** for the consumer;
4. Compliance with **legal requirements** is a prerequisite to classification;
5. Classification systems must ensure **cleanliness and proper maintenance** of the establishments in all star categories;
6. Classification systems should encourage the use of **quality management tools**;
7. **Tour operators and travel agents**, as well as **hotel booking and review sites** are invited to use the official classification. If they use their own rating scheme alongside, they should specify so;
8. Classification systems should ensure that **accurate and up-to-date data on the rating of establishments are provided** to tour operators, travel agents, hotel booking and review sites;
9. The **number of stars** obtainable shall be one to five;
10. Stars must be granted/confirmed only after a **control**;

11. This control must take place **regularly**;
12. This control must take place **on site**;
13. **Complaints by customers** relating to classification should be dealt with in a systematic manner;
14. **Explanation** for classification decisions have to be made available to the hotel concerned;
15. Every classification system must allow for an **appeal by the hotel** concerned against the result of the classification;
16. Classification systems should have some **range of flexibility** in the application of their criteria;
17. Classification criteria should be regularly adjusted to **market requirements**. A systematic **inventory process** of the criteria should take place regularly;
18. Whenever **research on consumer expectations** in relation to classification is carried out in one country, it is desirable that the results are made available to all HOTREC member associations;
19. When classification systems are set up/reviewed, **equipment and service criteria should be emphasised** in order to facilitate European and international harmonisation efforts;
20. When classification systems and criteria are set up/reviewed, **cooperation with other countries** is encouraged in order to facilitate European and international harmonisation efforts;
21. Classification systems should always involve the hospitality industry. In the countries, where the classification system is regulated and/or operated by public authorities, it is essential that the public authorities work in **close partnership** with the private sector.

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