

## **Biotourism and cross-border cooperation as a valuable investment for future generations**

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Allow me to express my great pleasure for being here today in this conference of particular importance in terms of bilateral and trans-boundary collaboration between our two countries.

I would like to congratulate the organizers and the Biopolitics International Organisation that brought together several environmental and tourism experts including the local authorities of both sides. It is an excellent opportunity to evaluate the extensive progress in the area and to highlight that partnerships between governments, community groups and the private sector have proven very useful in shaping the urban and rural landscape of tomorrow in an environmentally responsible manner.

In this context, let me underline the significant personal contribution of Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, not only in this conference, but in environmental issues and the development of specific national and regional policies. Her academic background and countless publications have been addressing issues like bio-policy and bio-diplomacy.

The project on Innovative Practices in Biotourism, funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece–Albania IPA Cross-Border Programme,” in the framework of which we have all gathered here today, expresses the needs of the local communities of Korçë in Albania and Prespa in Greece. The aim is to promote sustainable economic development with a view to further expanding the cooperation and coordination on common business initiatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance given to environmental issues by our government. Especially, the Albanian government has been collaborating with neighbor countries for optimum environmental management in order to tackle pollution. Environmental protection is a vital investment for future generations. The sustainable management of natural resources requires an integrated approach towards the cycles of natural resources, energy and waste within urban and rural areas. The objectives of such an approach have led to the preparation of a national legal framework respecting all international acts, European legislation and signed bilateral agreements.

The Albanian–Greek agreements for the protection and good management of trans-boundary ecosystems have created a solid base for cooperation and understand-

ing on all levels. In this context, I am referring to the bilateral agreement for trans-boundary water issues in the framework of which a Joint Commission for the protection and the sustainable use of the Vjosa River and Prespa Lake was set up. The Joint Commission is composed by experts of both countries in charge of sustainability and management of the areas around the Vjosa River and Prespa.

Another important trilateral act is the Agreement for the protection of the Prespa Lake signed by the Ministers of Environment of Albania, Greece and FYROM. The agreement created the necessary political and environmental dimensions in terms of sustainability between all levels of regional and local governments in order to achieve greater coherence in policy and action.

These remote areas away from the loaded urban transport and population density, in possession of clean air and green spaces represent an attractive and calming oasis for everyone. It is our personal and collective responsibility, in both regional and local administrative levels, to preserve and enrich the area by turning it to a tourism attraction. Tourism development will deliver direct benefits for these zones and their residents. In this context, all connections and interactions will lead to the creation of new bridges of cooperation between both sides of the borders as a concrete investment in the development of economy and tourism.

I have the pleasure to express my greetings and congratulations to a very honored personality, Dr. Panayotis Koliomihalis, who has prepared a cart postals exhibition dating back to the last century, which will open today as an excellent evidence of shared heritage based on the common cultural, traditional and historical values.

In conclusion, I would like to express my personal conviction for the intensification of collaboration between both countries as well as the further consolidation in all levels and areas in terms of regional and bilateral initiatives that will help in this direction.