

# BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

## Biotourism and Development – Arta & Preveza

### *Athens Money Show*

*Hilton Athens, Room Erato C*

*Sunday, December 21, 2014, 12:00 to 14:00*

### PRESS RELEASE

A very successful event for the dissemination of the results of the project on “**Actions for the promotion and emergence of the comparative advantages of Arta and Preveza,**” which was realized by the **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O. – [www.biopolitics.gr](http://www.biopolitics.gr))** under the **European Commission’s LEADER program**, convened in the framework of the **Athens Money Show**, at the **Hilton Athens**, with the participation of academics, business leaders, hotel management students, journalists, tourism entrepreneurs and other professionals.



The event was chaired by **Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis**, President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation, who opened the discussions by stressing that biotourism – tourism that supports the environment and conserves natural and cultural resources – is a precious tool for the discovery of the wealth of our planet. “In a vertical perspective, biotourism draws inspiration from a deeply rooted past, while its horizontal dimensions promote environmental and minimally intrusive travel, allowing for a greater appreciation of local habitats and cultures. It is not limited to fun and recreation, but contributes decisively to the development of a wholesome tourism system and a better quality of life. We are living in dangerous times. Not only because of the economic and

environmental crises that are most evident, but because of a severe crisis in leadership, present on a local and global scale. Since 1988, Biopolitics has proposed a new vision to help society exit the crisis in values and attain a hopeful future. A vision inspired by the infinite value of the Greek cultural heritage. Greece can serve as the ideal international center for the assessment of societal and economic progress in all fields. With a thesis, antithesis and synthesis of new values, progress will be re-evaluated on the basis of supporting the continuity of bios on our planet. The options are endless: Kos, the island of Hippocrates, can serve as a meeting place for medicine, Icaria for aeronautics, Knossos for architecture, Sparta for legislation. Specialists can meet to assess progress and convey a message of hope by implementing life-supporting trends in their respective fields. The land of Epirus is unique. The Ambrakian democracy predated the Athenian democracy by 74 years. Set against impressive natural landscapes and laced with a majestic past, Arta and Preveza symbolize the birthplace of the western world. This immense natural and cultural wealth is the cornerstone of biotourism for a resource efficient and hopeful future.”

The next speaker to take the floor was **Irene Vassilopoulou**, President of “Women in Tourism” and owner of St. George Lycabettus Hotel in Athens and Paradissos Hotel in Andros. She focused on the decisive contribution of culture to tourism development and also discussed the role of women in tourism, a role which is particularly prominent internationally. “Eurostat recently announced that 56% of those employed in the tourism sector are women. Also, the WTO reported that, in Greece, women in tourism represent over 50%. Culture and tourism are intricately linked, and the role of women in this sector has also been pivotal. The International Cultural Tourism Charter that was signed in Brussels, in 1976, laid the ground for a regulatory framework which respected a certain destination’s cultural heritage, together with the interests of visitors and local communities. In 1999, UNESCO founded two academic chairs Chair in Cultural Tourism for Peace and Development: one at the Sorbonne and the other at the Russian International Academy for Tourism. Cultural tourism is the essence of biotourism. The Association which I have the honor of chairing, has as its mission to found a Tourism Museum in Greece, a country with a vast cultural tourism tradition. This initiative is supported by diplomats, political leaders, artists and stakeholders from the tourism sector, and we believe we are very close to realizing this vision.”

**Prof. George Stournaras** from the Department of Environmental Geology at the University of Athens, spoke about geotourism as an important subsector of biotourism. “Greece is blessed with a unique geomorphology as a result of numerous tectonic and volcanic events. Its impressive coastline, which stretches for more than 15,000 km, as well as lofty coastal mountains like Mt. Olympus are the outcome of these events. This geological heritage needs to be capitalized upon in the framework of biotourism. It is our duty to promote the geologic beauties of our country, and the tourism industry should cooperate with the geology community to achieve this goal. The science of geology has contributed immensely to the development of infrastructure, such as roadworks, incline stability and underground water supplies. Today, its contribution to tourism is manifested through the establishment of geoparks which promote geological heritage of international significance. Greece features two organized geoparks: one in Sigri, on the island of Lesvos and the other at the Cave of the Lakes in Kalavryta. Geoparks also use geological and cultural heritage to raise awareness of key issues facing society and to preserve local traditions and customs. Some international institutions, such as the European Commission, are particularly supportive of geoparks. Another important aspect of biotourism is spa and wellness tourism, which is associated with mineral springs. Unfortunately, such facilities have not been developed enough in Greece,

and more attention needs to be paid to this sector. Arta and Preveza are blessed with the Ambrakian wetlands, which were among the first wetlands to gain protection under the Ramsar Treaty. These wetlands are created by the Louros and Arachthos Deltas and their protection is of capital importance for the preservation of local ecosystems, currently under risk from polluting activities taking place hundreds of kilometres away. The Louros and the Arachthos supply water to Arta, Preveza and the island of Lefkada. Pollution of these rivers is disastrous for fisheries and estuaries along the entire Ambrakian Gulf. Protecting our geological heritage needs to become a priority for biotourism.”



**George Kazantzopoulos**, Member of the Environment Commission of the International Olympic Committee, declared his support for B.I.O.’s mission to place respect for the environment and bios at the core of the Olympic Games, a goal propounded since 1985. “We all support sustainable development which promotes wellbeing, the economy and a healthy environment. These three principles come together around the concept of bios, their common unifying element. Everyone who is involved in sport, from those who simply exercise to the athletic elite, is part of the Olympic movement. Through its unwavering efforts, the Biopolitics International Organisation breeds the idea that every individual should be involved in the Olympic Games. Staging the Olympic Games is a very demanding process. And the big question is: what happens to host cities after the Games leave town? The Environment Commission of the International Olympic Committee has developed sustainability indexes, and prospective host cities need to ensure the long-term sustainability of their infrastructure, as well as the protection of their natural and cultural heritage. Sustainable tourism does not require expertise, it requires commitment. Tourism necessitates infrastructure, know-how, human resources, cultural and natural capital. It also necessitates environmentally-conscious service provider and consumer behaviors. Vancouver and London can serve as examples of host cities that capitalized upon the opportunity offered by the Olympic Games to build a more sustainable tourism industry. Both cities created networks of hotels and tourism infrastructure that meet specific sustainability criteria. London also created a sustainable food supply chain, which grants certification to food purveyors who provide environmentally sustainable products and services. Arta and Preveza

have the history and natural resources required to constitute a geographical entity where all stakeholders can try to apply the principles of sustainable tourism and to become a model for the development of the entire area. This kind of biotourism development can increase competitiveness and ensure the long-term sustainability of the area's rich natural and cultural heritage. What we need to understand in these crucial times is that we can print money to deal with the financial crisis but we cannot print leaves on the trees that allow bios to prosper and humanity to thrive.”

**Theocharis Provatakis**, f. General Secretary at the Greek Ministry of Culture, focused his speech on the contribution of Arta and Preveza as important historical and cultural centers of the ancient and modern world. “Arta and Preveza are laden with over 50,000 years of history and culture. The area is peppered with monuments dating from classical antiquity to the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. Nine Byzantine churches in Arta and four basilicas in Preveza, along with a myriad of vernacular buildings and a rich cultural heritage, have rendered these beautiful regions into sites of unique cultural merit, into a living and breathing museum. There is a sense of continuity in these hallowed grounds. Local culture and tradition have remained unchanged for centuries, as witnessed by an inescapable continuity between the ancient temples and the Christian churches, built in the same architectural style and prototype. Biotourism has its roots in the ancient world. Pilgrimages to oracles and sanctuaries, usually done by sea, are the forefathers of cultural biotourism and spiritual tourism that are practiced today. Arta and Preveza also have one of the richest folklore traditions. Festivals, customs and the local cuisine have remained unchanged for centuries. This is a blessed land because it has a heart and soul, and, every year, hundreds of biotourists pay tribute to its historic and cultural treasures.”

**Elias Palialexis**, Journalist for the Athens News Agency and Onecon.gr, highlighted the role of the modern media in the promotion of biotourism. “The ancient Greek myth of Persephone who was forced to spend half her life in the underworld teaches us that whoever oversteps nature's bounds is punished. Why? Because Persephone committed hubris by picking the most beautiful flower in the meadow. As repeatedly stressed by Prof. Vlavianos Arvanitis climate change is the greatest threat. However the international media are still not paying enough attention to the urgency of the protection of bios. Environmental issues are still a low priority on their agenda because they're not commercial enough. An issue which did not receive the attention it deserves is the climate change discussion that recently took place in Lima, paving the way for the creation of an international agreement due to be settled at the next UN summit, in Paris, in December 2015. It is difficult to be optimistic about the future. The UN believes that targets cannot be met without a firm and binding commitment to reduce emissions. The USA and India, who together are responsible for 45% of global emissions, have agreed to proceed to emissions reduction. China also made a similar commitment, while the UN's Green Climate Fund has as its target to raise 100 billion dollars. The use of clean energy sources and investment in green technologies in all European countries need to be increased. The probability for warmer summers has more than doubled in the European continent, and according to US estimates, climate change has increased the threats of terrorism, social inequality, trafficking, hunger, poverty, disease, and humanitarian crises. We need a global commitment to meet these threats. Seventeen new Sustainable Development Goals dedicated to improving the well being of present and future generations have been developed by the UN, but everyone needs to be involved. Ethical guidelines and codes of conduct are vital in this effort. Think globally, act locally. Projects like the present one are more essential than ever. The media have the responsibility not only to inform but also to educate. Experts have already signalled that the world is in the grip of

the worst destruction of the last 1000 years. We ought to get angry. Angry with ourselves, and with our past. We ought to change and press for change. We ought to become the change we would like to see in the future. Prof. Vlavianos Arvanitis and the team of the Biopolitics International Organisation are a source of inspiration and the driving force for this change. They are among the forces that can keep Persephone far above the darkness of the underworld once and for all.”

The event concluded with a brief discussion with members of the audience. Some of the issues raised concerned the development and management of forest tourism, as well as the availability of tourism infrastructure for autistic people and their families.



All of the printed material developed for the project (biotourism map and guide, pamphlets, posters, etc.) was on display during the event and available free of charge.

