



Participants from Nine Countries Discuss the Future of the Danube in Sofia

Investments in nature conservation create new jobs and well-being for the local communities in the region

Sofia, 28 February 2017 – Over fifty participants from 9 countries discussed in Sofia the future of the Danube region at a conference organized by WWF Bulgaria. **Innovative solutions, supporting livelihoods and business opportunities in communities with low economic status in the regions along the Danube River** were the focus of the international conference “**Local Economy and Nature Conservation in the Danube Region**” (LENA).

During the conference, held between 22 and 24 February in the city of Sofia, representatives of 17 organizations laid **the foundations of an international cooperation aimed at connecting nature and people for their well-being and prosperity.**

„We all know that nature is certainly beautiful in many ways, but it is not only about aesthetics; it is also about the services that we receive from nature – such as carbon dioxide storage or pollination”, pointed out Sylvia Barova, Directorate-General for the Environment of the European Commission. According to her, the total amount of financial benefits from the entire network in Europe are estimated to 200-300 billion euro per year. On the other hand, the investments, including those in management of the network, amount to 6 million euro per year. This means that if you invest one Euro you might get 50 in return. “This data was also confirmed by the last fitness check evaluation of the two



directives (EU Birds and Habitats Directives) which are the foundation for the Natura 2000 network”, added Barova.

Some of the upcoming activities of the partnership along the Danube will address the development of tourism and sustainable transport in the region by using e-bikes and the creation of opportunities for sustainable income generation and natural resource management with a focus on agriculture, wild plants gathering and fishing. Pilot projects for business initiatives will be implemented in 11 zones from the Natura 2000 network.

The partnership, which is being created in the framework of this conference, is essential both for the natural heritage of Central and Eastern Europe and for the local communities in the Danube region. “Its role in the years to follow will be to demonstrate which instruments for sustainable use of nature resources work best and to find out the best models, easily applicable at a larger scale“, stated Vesselina Kavrakova, WWF Bulgaria Country Director. “Therefore, a cooperation of this scope, bringing so many countries together, is so important”, added Kavrakova.

The was held in the framework of the project LENA - Local Economy and Nature Conservation in the Danube Region - aimed at providing innovative solutions for development of economic activities in protected territories along the Danube river and its tributaries in harmony with nature. There are a total of 17 project partners that include local authorities, institutions for management of protected areas and organizations for local economic development and ecology. They come from 9 different countries along the Danube river: Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Croatia. The project is financed by the Danube Transnational Program.

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