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Western Balkans tourism route for international market

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Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is currently implementing an EU funded project focused on tourism networking of Western Balkans (WB) economies and joint global promotion of the region in order to bring more tourists and generate profit. Within the 5-million euro project, 1.62 million euro is dedicated to grants. These days the RCC launched a new grant call worth 750,000 euro.

Tourism is a development opportunity for all WB6 economies with vast potentials, and with several well organised routes the number of tourists in the region could be well increased, as stated by the RCC. These days the RCC published the 2nd call for proposals for implementation of around 14 pilot projects worth up to EUR 54,000.

Nikola Gaon, in charge of promotion of these projects at the RCC, explains the design of the project and its ultimate goal.

“With this project we wish to promote the best of the region through several cultural and adventure routes to be offered to the international market. One of these routes is the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations utilising our common cultural heritage from Greek to Austro-Hungarian period. Some 40 sites have already been identified across the WB6 to be included in this route, because our goal is to have tourists coming to the region visit at least three economies,” says Gaon.

Nikola Gaon also said that development of the Illyricum Trail is planned.

“This route is based on Roman archeologic sites. It starts in Herzegovina, goes through Montenegro, Albania and Republic of North Macedonia, and ends in Serbia where it connects to the European Roman Emperors Route. We hope to attract many more visitors from abroad with these offers, which will result in increased employment; hence, the benefits are multiple,” explained the RCC official.

Via and Trans Dinarica projects, regional hiking and biking trails and their auxiliary adventure tourism attractions, have been launched earlier.

Gaon said that they had been presented at international tourism fairs and triggered large interest, adding that the RCC recognised the tourism potential as a development opportunity for the WB economies.

“Around 12 million people enter the Western Balkans annually. Tourism already accounts for around 25% of exports and 14% of GDP, and the number of employees in tourism stands at approximately the same level. We wish to increase these figures and, through these projects,

enable their further upward trend. Moreover, we wish to shift the tourism offers from being focused exclusively on beaches, sun and snow, and bring something different closer to tourists from distant countries, but also those from the neighbourhood, and spark their interest in frequent and longer stay in this part of Europe,” explains Gaon, adding that young people have been involved in the project and were given the opportunity to promote tourism offers through photos of their economy’s natural beauties, with authors of the best works receiving awards.